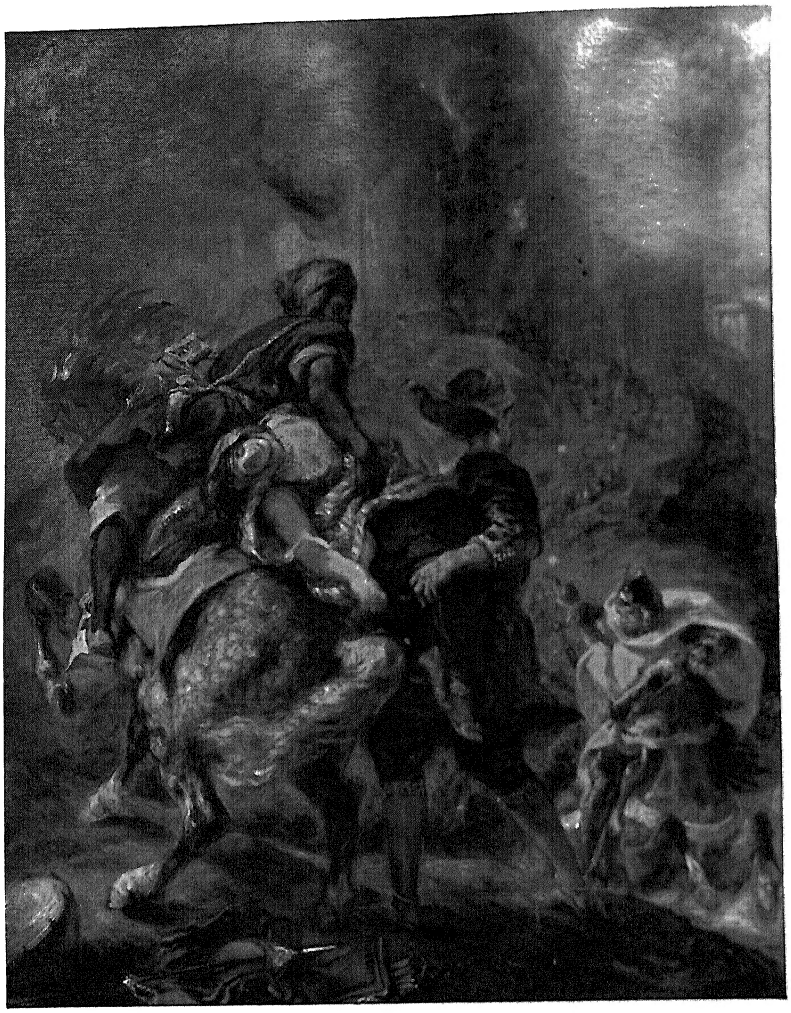
MAINSTREAMS OF MODERN ART

Ingres: *The Bather of Valpinçon*

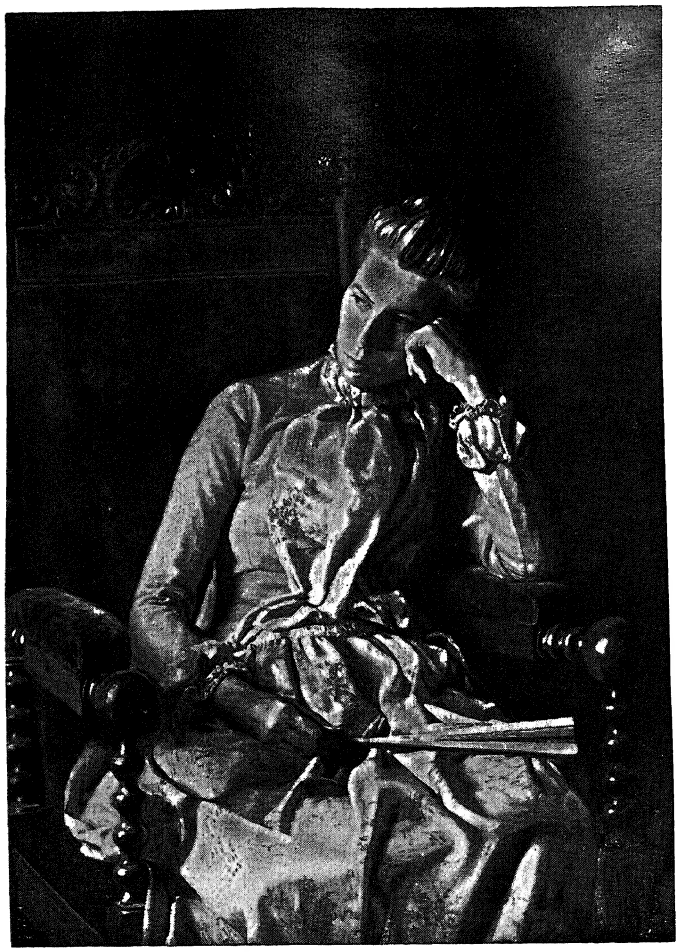
On the principle that anyone beginning a trip should have a general idea of the route he is to take, the following fifteen paintings are offered as an introduction to this book. They are waystops, and they reappear in the body of the text.

As the nineteenth century opened, painting was dominated by France (as it continued to be), and French painting was dominated by the classicists. As an adjunct to the political idealism of the French Revolution in its first days, classicism in painting was dedicated to a revival of the intellectual purity and the moral force of ancient Greece and Rome as they were currently imagined by philosophers and aestheticians. But before long, classicism degenerated into a fettering code of arbitrary rules and standards. By the middle of the century the demigod of the school was a pedantic tyrant and a great artist named Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, who mercilessly dictated these sterile recipes, yet rose above them in his own art. His *The Bather of Valpinçon* observes the rules in its precision, its enamellike surface, its carefully controlled drawing, its limitation of color within sharply defined boundaries. But in spirit the picture is sensuous beneath its careful surface. Ingres was a classicist by habitual conviction, but by the evidence of his work he had more in common than he realized with the warmth and sentiment of the men who were in revolt against his dogma – the romantics. (Louvre, Paris. Reproduction courtesy Phaidon Press, Ltd.)



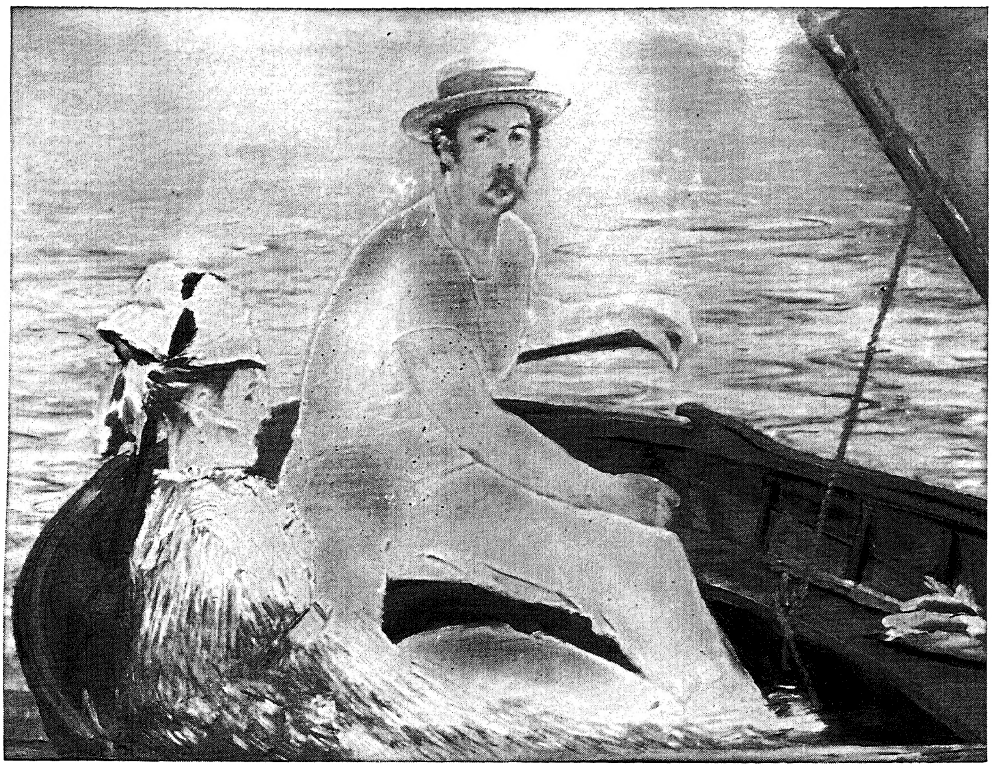
Delacroix: *The Abduction of Rebecca*

The romantics believed in the expression of emotion at whatever violation of convention, believed in originality rather than in rule, in complication rather than in purity, and preferred risk to safety. Romanticism was a way of life as well as a revolt in the arts, and its triumph was inevitable in times when the world's disorder gave little support to the classical ideal of ultimate order and serenity. Romanticism was international, with a strong early impulse in Germany, but found its leader and spokesman, as far as painting was concerned, in Eugène Delacroix, another Frenchman. His *Abduction of Rebecca* contrasts in every way with Ingres's *The Bather of Valpinçon;* it is a turbulent subject turbulently painted in rich colors that shatter and explode across swarming and fluttering masses, expressing everywhere the agony and excitement of the human spirit. Yet for all this emotionalized effect, Delacroix as much as Ingres, or even more than Ingres, achieved his ends by intellectualized use of his means. He regarded himself as a true classicist and the nominal classicists as false ones, since his goal was the total expression of human emotion on the grand scale, in images of universal significance. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Wolfe Fund.)



Eakins: *Miss Van Buren*

In spite of their differences, the classicists and the romantics shared a mutual characteristic: they were idealists who ignored the world around them to explore imagined ones. As the century began to coalesce into the great age of the common man, dominated not by theoretical ideals but by bourgeois practicality, a new school triumphed over the two earlier ones and put an end to their war with one another. The Ingres and the Delacroix of realism was Gustave Courbet, who said, "Show me an angel and I will paint one." In one form or another, realism dominated painting until near the end of the century, and in America it found a great man in Thomas Eakins, for whom Ingres's serene bathers and Delacroix's abducted maidens were less interesting than the people he saw going about their daily affairs in his native Philadelphia. Eakins's portrait of Miss Van Buren is one of the most impressive of his revelations of personality and his creations of poetic mood achieved through what seems to be nothing more than the objective recreation of the natural appearance of an everyday subject. (Phillips Collection, Washington, D. C.)



Manet: *Boating*

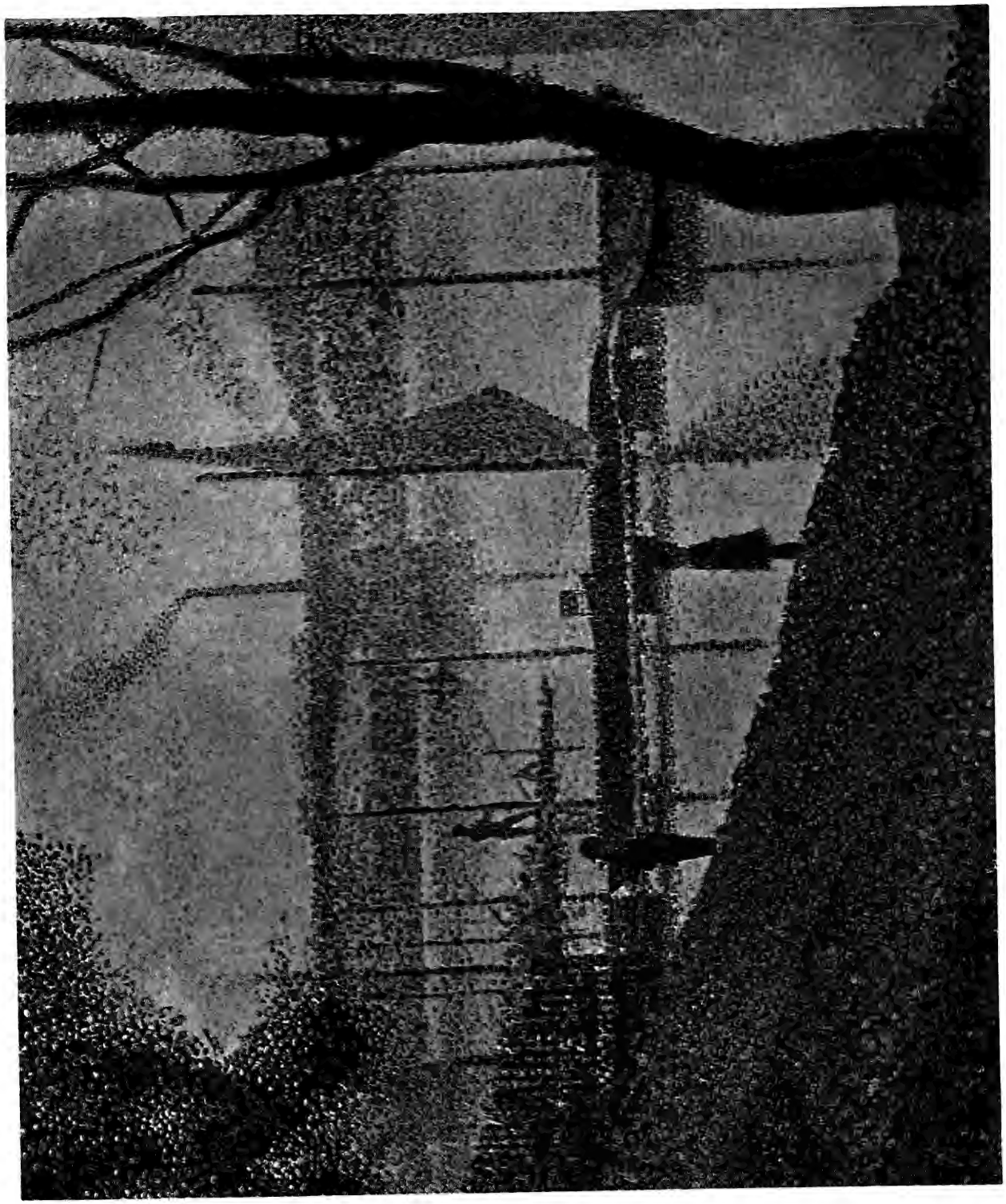
In France, realism found its most delightful expression in its variation, impressionism. The impressionists are the best loved painters today. Everyone knows Renoir, Degas, and Monet. But the early struggles of these men were without precedent. Some of them were frequently without money to buy paints while established hacks, now forgotten, sold pictures for high prices as fast as they could paint them.

The impressionists' first martyr was a man a little older than they, who paved the way for them — Édouard Manet. He fortunately had private means of support while he was attacked and vilified for the revolutionary character of an art that now seems conventional enough. Impressionism was an art of suggestion, an art of intimate charm, of commonplace subjects informally presented but elevated above the commonplace by unusual perceptions and a vibrant love of the good but simple things of life. Manet's *Boating* was painted late in his career when he adopted some of the impressionists' cursory technique and shared briefly their fascination with subjects in open air impregnated with shimmering light. This detail, at approximately the size of the original, may show why impressionism offended a public that had become accustomed to the idea of painting as the approximation of the appearance of objects in photographic detail. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection.)

Seurat: *The Bridge at Courbevoie*

By the time the century entered its last decade, the impressionists had won their battle, but impressionism had also revealed its limitations. The several men who departed from impressionism to open the way to what we call "modern" art are grouped under the not very descriptive title of post-impressionists, which means nothing more than that they found their individual solutions to problems with which impressionism was not concerned.

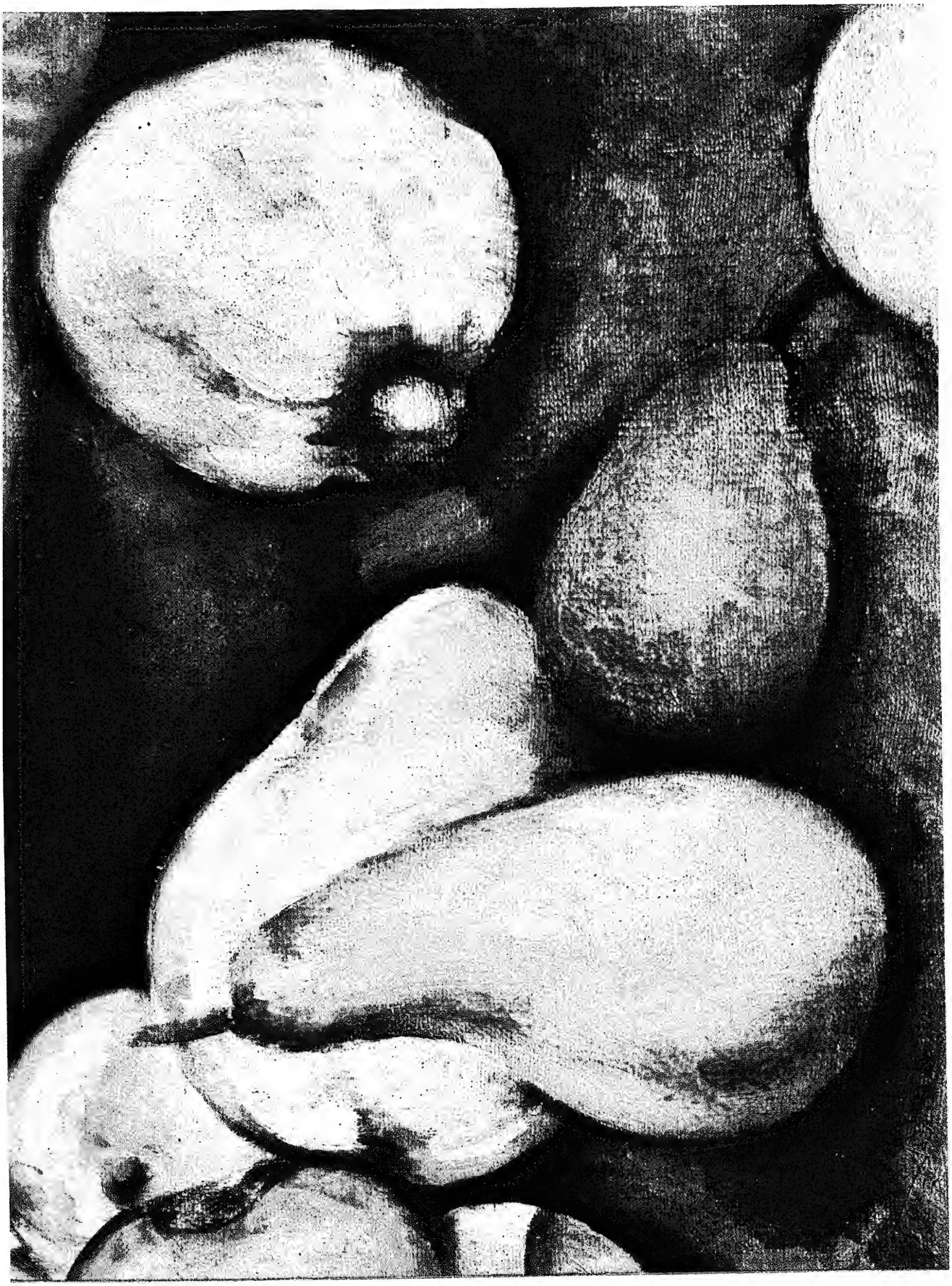
Georges Seurat based his art on impressionism's bright, broken color, but he disciplined it relentlessly into myriads and myriads of tiny dots applied with scientific calculation. Impressionism's limitation was a loss of form, a suggestion of transience and hence of triviality. Seurat returned to the classical ideal of rule and regulation, of precision and exquisitely adjusted balance. But he retained the impressionist love of sparkling light and communion with the world of everyday experience. He died just as he entered his thirties, but not before he had demonstrated that formal discipline need not imply sterile repetition. (Home House Society, Courtauld Institute of Art, London.)

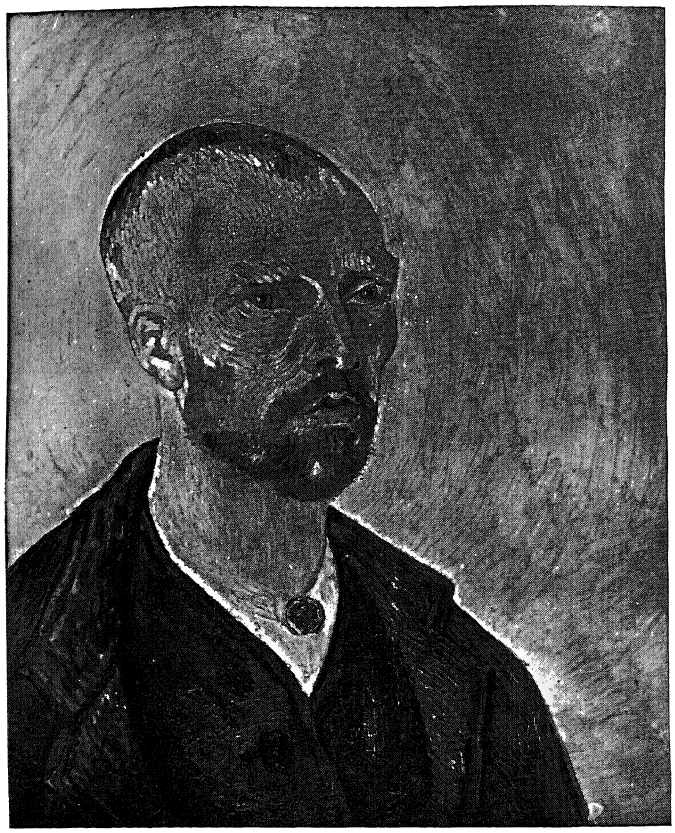


Cézanne: *The White Sugar Bowl*

The problem of reconciling impressionism and formal discipline was attacked in a different way, and a more revolutionary one, by the giant of modern painting — Paul Cézanne.

To try to say much about Cézanne's theories in a paragraph is utterly pointless. We can say that they were based on the conviction that impressionist intimacy and love of the visible world could be combined with the classical ideal of universal statement, that common objects and people could be as majestic as mountains and gods. Cézanne's overwhelming importance in modern painting is that in solving his problems he never hesitated to violate such conventions as perspective and "normal" appearance, to tilt or warp a form into balance with another, itself tilted or warped, until his picture was brought into a state of balance that represented the inherent order of the universe and the dignity of man within it. Cézanne's distortions are acceptable now even to the uninitiated, because in comparison with the much more violent distortions of contemporary art, of which they were a source, they seem mild. But through these distortions and through the theories that led to them, Cézanne changed the direction that art had been following for nearly seven hundred years. (Collection Henry P. McIlhenny, Philadelphia.)



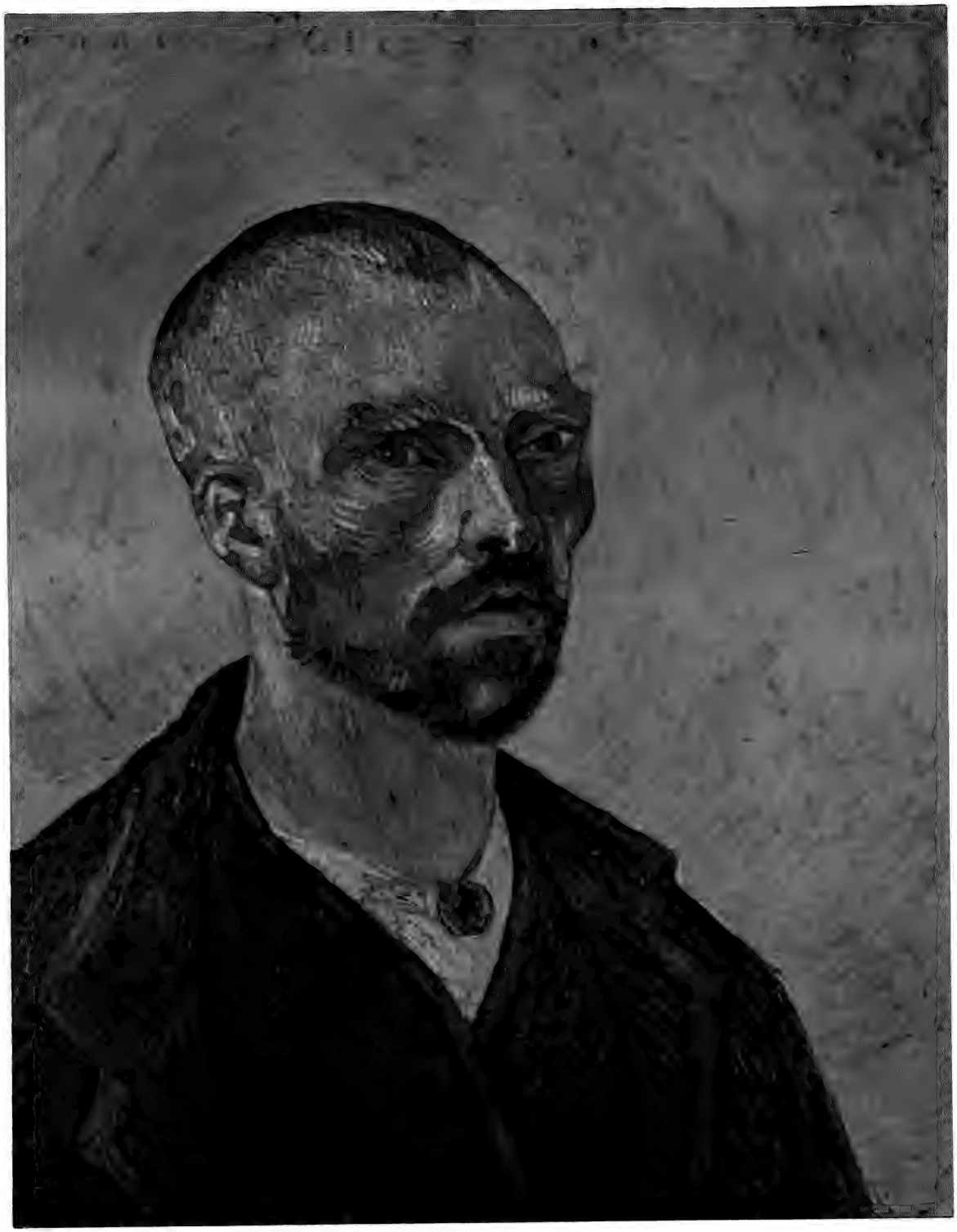


Van Gogh: *Self-portrait*

Seurat and Cézanne reinterpreted and revitalized the classical ideal. Two other men, in the meanwhile, continued and extended the romantic tradition of revolt and personal emotionalism. They were Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin, whose tragic and disastrous lives were interlocked.

Van Gogh, who was not mad, has become the symbol of the mad genius cherished by everyone who believes that emotionalized painting is a spontaneous gushing-out of the soul onto the canvas. Van Gogh's art seems to support such an idea, in its rush, its vehemence, even in the physical character of his pigment, which may twist and swirl or be thrust upon the canvas as if the artist were impelled to create by forces beyond his control. But everything that van Gogh wrote about his way of work, and all the studies he made for his paintings, show that his intensity is relayed to us through means that he developed painfully and studiously. Poverty, loneliness, and ill health drove him to suicide in his thirties. During his lifetime he had sold exactly one picture, unless we count those that he traded for paints and brushes.

(Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. Bequest of Maurice Wertheim.)



Gauguin: *The Vision after the Sermon – Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*

Gauguin also died in poverty, alone, and miserably, and his life was at least as disordered as van Gogh's. The difference is that Gauguin chose his way of life, while van Gogh's was imposed upon him. A successful businessman, Gauguin first painted as a hobby, then as a passion that bankrupted him, cost him his family, and led him finally to a life in the South Seas that was idyllic enough in theory but sordid and violent in fact.

Gauguin was led to the South Seas by an appetite for primitive and exotic subjects that had preoccupied him from his earliest days as an artist. He painted *The Vision after the Sermon,* showing Breton peasants witnessing their literal conception of the struggle between Jacob and the Angel, in much the same spirit in which, later, he painted the natives of the South Seas haunted by the spirits they believed in. In returning to forms of primitive inspiration and expressing his primitive subjects in nonnaturalistic color, Gauguin along with Cézanne and van Gogh gave impetus to the modern idea of painting as the invention of forms and colors rather than as the imitation of nature. (National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.)

Nolde: *Life of Maria Aegyptiaca,* First Episode: "Early Sinful Life"

From these men and others who struck out in new directions, the complicated and contradictory revolutions, assaults, and forays of twentieth-century art developed. The most direct followers of van Gogh and Gauguin were the German expressionists, who painted vigorously from the first decade of the new century until the time of Hitler with his art "reforms." Religion, sex, and the compassionate observation of human misery were among the major obsessions of the expressionists, always with the most intense personal reference, in pictures dedicated as were van Gogh's to the release of some inner anguish. As all the new isms were to be, expressionism was greeted with furor, diatribes, and laughter by the general public but was supported by an increasing number of dealers, collectors, and advanced critics. Emil Nolde's *Life of Maria Aegyptiaca* with its intentional ugliness, its therapeutic coarseness, its exaggerated violence of color, was offensive to a public that had only recently come around to accepting as "modern" the gentle, lyrical world created by the impressionists. The expressionist movement spread beyond Germany but was basically northern in its brooding emotionalism, just as van Gogh, the Dutchman painting in France, was northern in his similar introspection. (Kunsthalle, Hamburg. Reproduction courtesy Frederick A. Praeger, Inc.)

Matisse: *Madame Matisse (The Green Line)*

The pathos, melancholy, and brutality of expressionism as it developed in Germany were foreign to the temperament and tradition of France. The parallel movement there was fauvism, also based on color, as German expressionism so largely was, but more closely related to the decorative color compositions of Gauguin than to the emotionalized color of van Gogh. The use of color for its own sake as much as for its expressive power marks Henri Matisse's fauvist portrait of his wife (usually called *The Green Line*) as an intellectual and theoretical exercise in spite of its undeniable expressive force. Balancing color against color, Matisse reduces his background to arbitrary areas, and in the face he introduces the unnaturalistic green line down the center for the reason that it is needed there as part of a scheme that falls to pieces without it.

Fauvism was a brief and loosely organized movement, the result of the largely coincidental appearance of a group of young Frenchmen experimenting with color as an abstract structural device. In a matter of a few years each member of the group had branched off into further experiments in different directions. More than any of them, Matisse remained first of all a colorist in a long lifetime during which, with Picasso, he became a most potent force in the transformation of the art of painting in the twentieth century. (*Statens Museum for Kunst,* Copenhagen, Rump Collection. Permission courtesy Mme. Marguerite Duthuit.)

Gris: *The Violin*

Even more than fauvism, cubism was an affront to a startled public and the majority of painters and critics. The two movements appeared at the same time; of the two, cubism was the more fertile one and the more disruptive.

Cézanne had established the idea that the form of natural objects might be subjected to whatever dislocations best served the painter in his effort to build pictorial structures. The cubists went further, extending this aspect of Cézanne's theories and combining them with others, until the visible world was only a point of departure for the creation of complicated geometrical structures in which objects finally became totally undecipherable. Juan Gris's *The Violin* was painted at a time when cubism had passed through its most extreme phase, and the objects that had been disintegrated in a theoretical demonstration had been partially reassembled. *The Violin* is a pattern in which discipline, harmony, and even poetic mood should be apparent to anyone willing to accept the legitimacy of other standards in painting than purely representational ones. But even today not everyone can do so, in spite of the fact that cubism as an independent movement has been absorbed by later ones, and the public has had half a century to absorb its shock. (*Kunstmuseum,* Basel.)

Picasso: *Girl before a Mirror*

Cubism released the genius of the most prolific, the most inventive, and the most eruptive painter of the century, the Spaniard Pablo Picasso. In spirit Picasso's work ranges from the tender melancholy of certain pre-cubist pictures to the titanic wrath of his *Guernica*, from sheer playful legerdemain to philosophical speculation to a kind of willful and grotesque brutality. Since cubism, of which of course he was an originator, Picasso has sallied away from and back to and around and about cubism's theories, adapting and transforming them in a hundred ways. Like so much of his work, his *Girl before a Mirror* is many things to many men — an analytical challenge to psychiatrists, a stunning pattern ready for filching to decorators, a landmark to historians of Picasso's development, a symbol of the twentieth century to sociologically minded aestheticians, and still, after so long a time, a gargantuan piece of charlatanry to people who refuse to accept its premises as honest ones. (Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Simon Guggenheim.)

Léger: *The City*

Cubism produced variants at every hand. Conspicuous among them was the mechanistic art of Fernand Léger, one of several painters and groups of painters who held the theory that since the twentieth century is the age of the machine, twentieth-century painting must "bear comparison with any manufactured object" in sleekness, and reflect at the same time the driving, pistonlike energies of the age, and the clamorous, dehumanized, strident rhythms of the modern metropolis. Léger attempted a synthesis of these ideas in *The City* with its clashing forms, its raucous color, but at the same time its painstaking pseudomechanical conventionalizations of such forms as telephone poles, billboards, girders, factories, robotlike human beings, and less readily identifiable elements suggesting parts of motors. But in the end, *The City* is an abstract painting rather than a subject picture – that is, pure form and pure color must be enjoyed more for themselves than for anything they "say." (Philadelphia Museum of Art, A. E. Gallatin Collection.)

Rivera: *Sugar Cane*

The most frequent and the most legitimate objection to abstract art is that the artist may sacrifice more through loss of meaning to a large audience than he gains in interest to a small one. The most forthright rejection of abstraction was made on the American continent, first in Mexico and then in the United States, by artists who had experimented with it and found it wanting. In Mexico the rejection was most dramatic when a group of painters undertook to decorate public buildings with frescoes directed not toward the intellectual pleasure of aesthetes but to the consciousness of the mass of the people, telling them the story of their national history and propagandizing for the government. In unabashedly propagandistic terms, Diego Rivera's *Sugar Cane* shows a foreign landlord prostituting the resources and the people of Mexico under a semifeudal system that the government intended to abolish.

In the United States the reaction against abstraction took a somewhat different form, glorifying the homely and provincial aspects of life in the part of the country least sympathetic to the cosmopolitanism of abstract art, or sometimes mildly satirizing the mores of the self-righteous. (Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert C. Morris.)

Chirico: *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street*

In Europe also there was a reaction against the often frigid and impersonally logical nature of abstraction. Surrealism, the cult of the mysterious, the irrational, and the bizarre, was an art of poetry and dream, distinguished from other painting of this general kind by its preoccupation with contemporary investigations of morbid psychology, and particularly with the theories of Sigmund Freud. In order to present their fantasies at maximum shock strength, the surrealists abandoned abstraction for the most acutely detailed representation of objects, although these objects were combined in irrational and usually nightmarish ways.

The great surrealist was Giorgio de Chirico, a man who had no formal connection with the movement but anticipated it in his vistas of deserted city squares illuminated by vivid but inexplicable light and spotted here and there with inexplicably sinister objects or figures. As a manifestation of the romantic spirit, surrealism, now dead as an organized movement, has been absorbed, with the other schools and movements we have seen here, into the mainstream of contemporary painting as it continues to flow, to meander, to divide, and to rejoin itself on its course into the future. (Collection Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Resor, New Canaan, Conn.)

MAINSTREAMS OF MODERN ART

John Canaday
ART CRITIC, THE
NEW YORK TIMES

MAINSTREAMS OF MODERN ART

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A BOOK OF THIS KIND INVOLVES SO MANY PEOPLE IN ITS PREPARATION THAT WHEN it is completed the author feels that it is only partly his own. The museums and the collectors who have made possible the illustrations are acknowledged in the captions, but there are so many other individuals who have been helpful to the author, or merely patient with him, that only a few of them can be thanked here.

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To all these people I am grateful. But to one other I am more than grateful and more than indebted for practical help, for encouragement, and for a sharing of ideas about painting. The best parts of this book belong

To Katherine

J. C.
Philadelphia Museum of Art
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CONTENTS

Part I THE NINETEENTH CENTURY IN FRANCE

Chapter 1 REVOLUTION 3

Modern Art, Tradition, and David • David's Life • David's Painting • *The Oath of the Horatii* • David and the Revolution • David: The Triumph of Classicism • David and Napoleon • David: The Artist • Sculptors and Other Painters • The Break with Classicism

Chapter 2 ROMANTICISM 30

The Romantic Spirit • Romantic Classicism: *Atala* • Napoleonic Romanticism: Gros • The Romantic Declaration: Géricault and the *Raft of the Medusa* • Delacroix • Delacroix: His "Classicism" • Delacroix: Early Works and Scandals • Delacroix: His Orientalism • Delacroix: Recognition and Followers

Chapter 3 INGRES 56

The Pedant • The Student • The Expatriate • The Troubadour • The Prodigal • Portraits and Drawings

Chapter 4 REALISM 74

Idealism and Disillusion • Goya: His World • Goya: His Isolation • Goya: His Innovations • Daumier: Realism and Bourgeois Culture • Daumier: Social and Political Comment • Daumier: His Faith • Daumier: His Life • Courbet: His Theories versus His Practice • Courbet: His "Socialism" • Courbet: *The Painter's Studio* • Courbet: The Pavilion of Realism • The State of Landscape • Barbizon: Rousseau, Dupré, Diaz • Daubigny • Millet • Corot: His Popular Success • Corot and the Tradition of Landscape • Corot: Portraits and Figure Studies

Chapter 5 THE SALON AT MID-CENTURY 136

The Academy and the Salon • The Salon of 1855 • Grand Medals of Honor, 1855 • Medals First Class, 1855 • Medals Second Class, 1855 • The Salon Public

Chapter 6 MANET 156

The *Salon des Refusés* • *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe:* Scandal • *Le Déjeuner:* Technical Innovations • *Le Déjeuner:* Borrowed Elements • *Olympia* • Manet before *Le Déjeuner* • The Scandal of *Olympia* • Manet and Zola • Manet and His Contemporaries • Late Pictures and Last Days

Chapter 7 IMPRESSIONISM 180

The Impressionist Group • The Nature of Impressionism • The Impressionist Inheritance • Monet • Sisley and Pissarro • Degas: *The Bellelli Family* • Degas: His Impressionism • Degas: His Classicism • Degas: His Humanity • Degas and the Impressionists • Rodin • Degas and Renoir • Renoir: The Mystique of Woman • Renoir and Impressionism • Renoir: Return to Tradition • Renoir: Fulfillment • Renoir: Last Pictures • Boudin and Jongkind • Bazille • Morisot • Cassatt • *Fin de Siècle:* Toulouse-Lautrec • The Post-impressionists

Part II THE NINETEENTH CENTURY OUTSIDE FRANCE

Chapter 8 OUTSIDE FRANCE, 1800–1850 237

Classicism and Benjamin West • West as an Innovator • John Vanderlyn: The Failure of Classicism • Early German Romantics • Blake • An American Romantic: Washington Allston • Early "Americanism" • The Hudson River School • Thomas Cole • English Romantic Landscape: Constable • Turner • Popular Painting at Mid-century • The American Scene: Bingham

Chapter 9 OUTSIDE FRANCE, 1850–1900 280

The Pre-Raphaelite Ideal • Rossetti • William Morris and the Arts and Crafts • Rossetti's Followers • Hunt, Millais, and Ruskin • Impressionism in England: Whistler and Others • Germany: Feuerbach and Böcklin • Later German Realism • The Americans after 1850 • America: Homer and the End of an Epoch • America: Thomas Eakins • Postscript: The Ash Can School

Part III TRANSITION

Chapter 10 POST-IMPRESSIONISM: ITS CLASSICISTS 327

The Explorers • Neo-impressionism: Seurat • The *Salon des Indépendants* • Other Neo-impressionists • Cézanne: His Revolution • Cézanne: Color as Form • Cézanne: Geometrical Form • Cézanne: Distortion and Composition • Cézanne: The Student • Cézanne: The Impressionist • Cézanne: Realization • Cézanne: Fulfillment • Cézanne: *The Great Bathers* • Sculpture in Transition: Maillol

Chapter 11 POST-IMPRESSIONISM: ITS ROMANTICS 360

The Nature of Expressionism • Van Gogh: *The Starry Night* • Van Gogh: Early Days and Works • Van Gogh: Arles, Saint-Rémy, and Auvers • Van Gogh: Later Work • Gauguin: Early Days and Arles • Gauguin: Pont-Aven and Le Pouldu • Gauguin: Tahiti and Last Years • The Nabis • Fantastic and Visionary Art: Redon • "Douanier" Rousseau

Part IV THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Chapter 12 FAUVISM AND EXPRESSIONISM 397

The Position of Matisse and Picasso • Fauvism and Expressionism • Matisse: Early Experiences and Discoveries • Matisse: The Birth of Fauvism • Other Fauve Painters • Rouault • Matisse after Fauvism • Expressionism: Precursors • Expressionism: *Die Brücke* • Expressionism: *Der Blaue Reiter* • Expressionism: *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* • Independent Expressionists • Expressionism in America

Chapter 13 CUBISM AND ABSTRACT ART 450

Cubism: The Early Picasso • Cubism: Its Beginnings • Cubism: Analytical Phase • Cubism: Synthetic Phase—Gris • A Cubist Variant: Léger • Cubism: Some Subdivisions • Futurism • Braque • Picasso: Cubist and Classical Variations • Picasso: *Minotauromachia* and *Guernica* • The Nonobjective Conclusion • Other Abstract and Nonobjective Isms

Chapter 14 REACTIONS AGAINST ABSTRACTION 502

The Mexican Renaissance • Mexico: The Second Generation • Regionalists and Social Realists • Surrealism • Dada • Mystery and Fantasy before Surrealism: Chirico • Chagall • Surrealism: Varieties and Variations

Appendix NOTES ON MODERN ARCHITECTURE 544

INDEX 555

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Belgian Congo: *Head* 4
2. Botticelli: Detail from *Birth of Venus* 4
3. Modigliani: *Female Portrait* 5
4. David: *Marie Antoinette on the Way to Execution* 7
5. David: *Antiochus and Stratonice* 9
6. David: *The Oath of the Horatii* 11
7. David: *The Death of Socrates* 12
8. David: *Lictors Bringing Back to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* 13
9. David: *Marat* 14
10. Berthault: *Assassination of Marat* 15
11. David: *The Battle of the Romans and Sabines* 16
12. David: Preliminary drawing for Figure 11 17
13. David: Study for Figure 11 19
14. David: *Madame Récamier* 20
15. David: *Le Sacre* 21
16. David: *Madame Sériziat* 22
17. David: *Monsieur Sériziat* 22
18. David: *Antoine Mongez and His Wife Angelica* 23
19. David: *Mars Vanquished by Minerva* 24
20. David: *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces* 24
21. Chinard: *Madame Récamier* 25
22. Regnault (J.B.): *Three Graces* 25
23. Gérard: *Psyche Receiving the First Kiss from Cupid* 26
24. Guérin: *Aurora and Cephalus* 26
25. Guérin: *Phaedra and Hippolytus* 27
26. Prud'hon: *Justice and Divine Vengeance Pursuing Crime* 28
27. Prud'hon: *Nude* 29
28. Girodet: *The Entombment of Atala* 32
29. Girodet: *Ossian Receiving the Generals of Napoleon* 33
30. Girodet: Preliminary study for Figure 29 33
31. Gros: *Colonel Fournier-Sarlovèze* 34
32. Gros: *Christine Boyer* 35
33. Gros: *Napoleon Visiting the Pesthouse at Jaffa* 36
34. Gros: Detail from Figure 33 37
35. Rembrandt: *Christ Healing the Sick* 37
36. Gros: *Hercules and Diomede* 38
37. Géricault: *Raft of the Medusa* 39
38. Géricault: Detail from Figure 37 40
39. Géricault: After Death (study) 41

40. Géricault: *Riderless Races at Rome* 42
41. Géricault: *Portrait of a Young Man* 42
42. Delacroix: *Self-portrait* 43
43. Delacroix: *The Lion Hunt* 44
44. Delacroix: *The Abduction of Rebecca* 45
45. Delacroix: *Dante and Vergil in Hell* 46
46. Delacroix: *Scenes of the Massacres at Scio* 47
47. Delacroix: Detail from Figure 46 47
48. Delacroix: Detail from *The Death of Sardanapalus,* 1827 48
49. Delacroix: *The Death of Sardanapalus,* 1844 50
50. Delacroix: Page from his Moroccan journal 51
51. Delacroix: *The Good Samaritan* 53
52. Delaroche: *The Children of Edward* 53
53. Devéria: *The Birth of Henry IV* 54
54. Marilhat: *Oriental Caravanserai* 54
55. Regnault (H.): *Automédon and the Horses of Achilles* 55
56. Michel: *The Old Chateau* 55
57. Ingres: *The Envoys of Agamemnon* 57
58. Ingres: *Madame Rivière* 59
59. Ingres: *Bather of Valpinçon* 60
60. Ingres: Detail from Figure 61 62
61. Ingres: *Jupiter and Thetis* 63
62. Ingres: *Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini* 64
63. Ingres: *The Vow of Louis XIII* 65
64. Ingres: *Apotheosis of Homer* 65
65. Ingres: *The Martyrdom of St. Symphorien* 66
66. Ingres: *Odalisque with the Slave* 67
67. Ingres: *Stratonice* 67
68. Ingres: *La Source* 68
69. Ingres: *The Turkish Bath* 69
70. Ingres: *François Marius Granet* 70
71. Ingres: *Comtesse d'Haussonville* 70
72. Ingres: *Comtesse de Tournon* 71
73. Ingres: *Monsieur Bertin* 72
74. Ingres: *Comte Turpin de Crissé* 73
75. Goya: *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* 75
76. Goya: *Ridiculous Folly* 76
77. Goya: *The Family of Charles IV* 77
78. Goya: *Don Manuel Osorio de Zuñiga* 78
79. Goya: *Que Tal?* 78
80. Goya: *And Nothing Can Be Done about It (Y no hai Remedio)* 79
81. Goya: *Saturn Devouring His Sons* 80
82. Goya: *Colossus* 80
83. Goya: *Portrait of His Wife, Josefa Bayeu* 81
84. Goya: *El Famoso Americano, Mariano Ceballos* 82
85. Goya: *El Pelele (The Manikin)* 83
86. Goya: *Marquesa de San Andrès* 83
87. Goya: *Marquesa de La Solana* 84
88. Goya: *Nude Maja* 86
89. Ingres: *Odalisque en Grisaille* 86
90. Goya: *Clothed Maja* 87
91. Delacroix: *Odalisque with Parrot* 87
92. Goya: *The Toreador José Romero* 88

93. Goya: *The Executions of May 3, 1808* 89
94. Delacroix: *Liberty Leading the People* 89
95. Daumier: *The Battle of Schools* 90
96. Daumier: *Boy Running* 91
97. Daumier: *Grandes Eaux à Versailles* 92
98. Daumier: *Saprelotte!—Full!* 93
99. Daumier: *Before Moreau's Picture at the Salon* 93
100. Daumier: *Three Months Behind in the Rent* 94
101. Daumier: *Turtledoves—Just the Way We Were* 94
102. Guys: The King and Queen of Greece and their suite passing the base of the Acropolis 95
103. Guys: *Une Élégante* 96
104. Daumier: *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza* 97
105. Daumier: *The Witnesses* 97
106. Daumier: *Le Ventre Législatif* 98
107. Daumier: *Rue Transnonain* 99
108. Daumier: *After the Trial* 99
109. Daumier: *Third Class Carriage* 100
110. Daumier: *Soup* 100
111. Daumier: *The Print Collector* 101
112. Daumier: *First Class Carriage* 101
113. Daumier: *Prison Choir* 102
114. Daumier: *The Good Friends* 102
115. Daumier: *The Drama* 103
116. Daumier: *Rider* 103
117. Courbet: *Young Bather* 104
118. Courbet: *Woman with a Parrot* 104
119. Courbet: *Two Girls on the Banks of the Seine* 105
120. Courbet: *A Spanish Woman* 106
121. Courbet: *Lady in a Riding Habit* 107
122. Courbet: *The Grotto* 108
123. Courbet: *The Man with the Leather Belt* 108
124. Courbet: *A Burial at Ornans* 109
125. Courbet: *Proudhon and His Daughters* 110
126. Courbet: *The Encounter (Bonjour, M. Courbet)* 111
127. Courbet: *The Painter's Studio* 113
128. Poussin: *The Funeral of Phocic* 114
129. Ruisdael: *The Cemetery* 117
130. Rousseau (T.): *Under the Birches* 118
131. Dupré: *The Hay Wagon* 119
132. Diaz: *Forest Path* 119
133. Daubigny: *River and Bridge* 120
134. Millet: *The Sower* 121
135. Millet: *The Gleaners* 121
136. Millet: *The Angelus* 122
137. Millet: *The Bleaching Tub* 122
138. Millet: *The Quarriers* 123
139. Corot: *Souvenir de Mortefontaine* 124
140. Daumier: *Corot Sketching at Ville d'Avray* 124
141. Corot: *View at Narni* 125
142. Corot: *Bridge and Castle of St. Angelo with Cupola of St. Peter's* 126
143. Corot: *View of the Farnese Gardens* 127
144. Corot: *View of the Quay of the Schiavoni, Venice* 128

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145. Meissonier: *View of Venice* 128
146. Corot: *The House and Factory of M. Henry* 129
147. Corot: *Village Church, Rosny* 130
148. Corot: *Mur, Côtes du Nord* 131
149. Leonardo da Vinci: *Mona Lisa* 132
150. Corot: *Woman with the Pearl* 132
151. Corot: *Interrupted Reading* 133
152. Picasso: *Lady with a Fan* 133
153. Corot: *Mother and Child on Beach* 134
154. Corot: *The Artist's Studio* 135
155. Corot: *Young Greek Girl* 135
156. Lebrun: *Louis XIV Offering Thanks* 137
157. Felicien Myrbach-Rheinfeld: *Candidates for Admission to the Paris Salon (Basement of Palais d'Industrie)* 138
158. Heim: *Charles X Distributing Awards, Salon of 1824* 139
159. Landseer: *A Distinguished Member of the Humane Society* 141
160. Landseer: *Blackcock* 142
161. Leys: *Interior of an Inn* 143
162. Meissonier: *La Rixe (The Brawl)* 143
163. Meissonier: *1814* 144
164. Decamps: *Oriental Night Scene* 145
165. Decamps: *The Experts* 146
166. Heim: *Scene from Jewish History* 147
167. Bonheur: *The Horse Fair* 148
168. Bonheur: *Barbaro after the Hunt* 148
169. Flandrin: *Study of Male Nude* 149
170. Troyon: *Cows Grazing* 150
171. Winterhalter: *Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha* 151
172. Gérôme: *Pygmalion and Galatea* 152
173. Daumier: *Pygmalion* 152
174. Gérôme: *Prayer in the Mosque of 'Amr, Old Cairo* 153
175. Bouguereau: *Youth and Cupid* 154
176. Bouguereau: *The Thank Offering* 155
177. Manet: *Spanish Guitar Player* 159
178. Couture: *The Romans of the Decadence* 160
179. Manet: Detail from Figure 181 161
180. Courbet: Detail from Figure 119 161
181. Manet: *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* 162
182. Giorgione: *Concert Champêtre* 162
183. Raimondi, after Raphael: *Judgment of Paris* 163
184. Manet: *The Balcony* 164
185. Goya: *Majas on a Balcony* 164
186. Manet: *Olympia* 166
187. Titian: *Venus of Urbino* 167
188. Couture: *Little Giles* 168
189. Manet: *Lola de Valence* 169
190. Manet: *Woman with a Parrot* 169
191. Cabanel: *Birth of Venus* 171
192. Manet: *Émile Zola* 172
193. Torii Kiyonaga: *Shigeyuki Executing Calligraphy* 173
194. Fantin-Latour: *A Studio in the Batignolles Quarter* 174
195. Fantin-Latour: *Still-life* 174
196. Fantin-Latour: *Homage to Berlioz* 175

197. Manet: *Le Bon Bock* 175
198. Manet: *Boating* 176
199. Manet: *Skating* 177
200. Manet: Detail from Figure 199 177
201. Manet: *George Moore* 178
202. Manet: *The Bar at the Folies Bergères* 179
203. Goya: *Dr. Peral* 182
204. Goya: Detail from Figure 203 182
205. Velásquez: *Venus and Cupid* 183
206. Velásquez: Detail from Figure 205 183
207. Monet: *Red Boats at Argenteuil* 184
208. Monet: *Terrace at Le Havre* 186
209. Monet: *Spring Trees by a Lake* 187
210. Monet: *Rouen Cathedral: Tour d'Albane, Early Morning* 188
211. Monet: *Water Lilies* 189
212. Monet: Detail from Figure 211 189
213. Pollock: *Autumn Rhythm* 189
214. Monet: *Woman in a Garden, Springtime* 190
215. Sisley: *Bridge at Villeneuve* 191
216. Pissarro: *The Market at Gisors* 192
217. Pissarro: *Avenue de l'Opéra* 193
218. Pissarro: *Landscape with Fields* 193
219. Degas: *The Bellelli Family* 194
220. Degas: Drapery study for *Sémiramis* 196
221. Degas: *Lady on Horseback* 196
222. Degas: Studies of Manet 197
223. Degas: *Two Café Singers* 198
224. Degas: *A Carriage at the Races* 198
225. Degas: *Diego Martelli* 199
226. Degas: *Foyer de la Danse* 200
227. Degas: *Portraits in an Office* 201
228. Degas: Detail of Michel Musson from Figure 227 201
229. Degas: *Estelle Musson (Mme. René De Gas)* 202
230. Degas: *Head of a Young Woman* 203
231. Degas: *Self-portrait in a Soft Hat* 203
232. Degas: *Degas's Father Listening to Lorenzo Pagans Singing* 204
233. Degas: *Ballerina and Lady with Fan* 205
234. Degas: *Women Ironing* 205
235. Degas: *Woman Scratching* 206
236. Degas: *Nude Arranging Her Hair* 206
237. Degas: *Woman Rubbing Her Back with a Sponge* 207
238. Degas: *Young Dancer* 207
239. Rodin: *The Hand of God* 208
240. Rodin: *The Kiss* 208
241. Rodin: *Gates of Hell* 209
242. Boucher: *Bath of Diana* 211
243. *Venus de Medici* 212
244. Renoir: *Bather with Griffon* 212
245. Renoir: *The Swing* 213
246. Renoir: *Moulin de la Galette* 214
247. Degas: *Café, Boulevard Montmartre* 214
248. Renoir: *Luncheon of the Boating Party* 215
249. Renoir: *Madame Charpentier and Her Daughters* 216

250. Renoir: *Dance at Bougival* 217
251. Renoir: *Bathers* 218
252. Girardon: Bas relief from Fountain of Diana, Versailles 218
253. Renoir: *Nude* 220
254. Renoir: *Two Girls at the Piano* 221
255. Renoir: *Young Girls Arranging a Hat* 221
256. Renoir: *Bather* 222
257. Boudin: *Beach at Trouville* 223
258. Jongkind: *Drawbridge* 223
259. Bazille: *The Artist's Family* 224
260. Bazille: *Summer Scene, Bathers* 224
261. Bazille: *The Artist's Studio* 225
262. Morisot: *Girl with a Basket* 226
263. Morisot: *Woman at Her Toilet* 226
264. Cassatt: *Woman Arranging Her Veil* 227
265. Cassatt: *Mother and Child* 227
266. Cassatt: *The Letter* 228
267. Toulouse-Lautrec: *The Salon in the Rue des Moulins* 229
268. Toulouse-Lautrec: *Oscar Wilde* 230
269. Toulouse-Lautrec: *Racing Stable Boy* 230
270. Toulouse-Lautrec: *Au Moulin Rouge* 231
271. Toulouse-Lautrec: *Two Women Dancing* 232
272. Toulouse-Lautrec: *Seated Female Clown (Mlle. Cha-U-Kao)* 233
273. Toulouse-Lautrec: *La Goulue at the Moulin Rouge* 234
274. West: *Cleombrotus Ordered into Banishment by Leonidas II, King of Sparta* 238
275. West: *The Death of General Wolfe* 239
276. West: *Penn's Treaty with the Indians* 240
277. West: *Arthur Middleton, His Wife and Son* 240
278. West: *Self-portrait* 241
279. West: *Death on a Pale Horse* (sketch) 241
280. Vanderlyn: *Marius amid the Ruins of Carthage* 242
281. Vanderlyn: *Ariadne Asleep on the Island of Naxos* 243
282. Schick: *Frau Heinrich von Dannecker* 244
283. Allston: *Italian Landscape* 244
284. Schinkel: *Greek City by the Sea* 245
285. Friedrich: *Cloister Graveyard in the Snow* 246
286. Friedrich: *Two Men Looking at the Moon* 246
287. Friedrich: *Moonrise over the Sea* 247
288. Wyatt, architect: Fonthill Abbey 247
289. Runge: *Naked Infant in a Meadow* 248
290. Runge: *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* 249
291. Blake: *Zacharias and the Angel* 250
292. Blake: Illustration for the Book of Job 251
293. Blake: "The Whirlwind of Lovers" 252
294. Palmer: *Opening the Fold* 252
295. Palmer: *Coming from Evening Church* 253
296. Fuseli: *The Nightmare* 253
297. Allston: *Jason Returning to Demand His Father's Kingdom* 254
298. Allston: *The Dead Man Revived by Touching the Bones of the Prophet Elisha* 254
299. Allston: *Moonlit Landscape* 256
300. Ryder: *Death on a Pale Horse (The Racetrack)* 256
301. Allston: *American Scenery: Time, Afternoon with a Southwest Haze* 257
302. Earl: *Roger Sherman* 257

303. Hicks: *The Peaceable Kingdom* 258
304. Hicks: Detail from Figure 303 258
305. Durand: *Kindred Spirits (Thomas Cole and William Cullen Bryant)* 259
306. Friedrich: *Mountain Peaks* 259
307. Bierstadt: *Merced River, Yosemite Valley* 260
308. Doughty: *In the Catskills* 261
309. Cole: *The Voyage of Life: Youth* 262
310. Cole: *The Voyage of Life: Manhood* 263
311. Cole: *The Oxbow of the Connecticut* 264
312. Constable: *Stoke-by-Nayland* 265
313. Constable: *The Hay Wain* 266
314. Constable: *Old Chain Pier, Brighton* 266
315. Constable: Detail from Figure 314 267
316. Turner: *Falls of the Rhine at Schaffhausen* 268
317. Turner: *Dido Building Carthage* 269
318. Turner: *Ulysses Deriding Polyphemus* 270
319. Turner: Detail from Figure 318 270
320. Turner: *Burning of the Houses of Parliament* 271
321. Turner: *The Slave Ship* 272
322. Turner: *Steamer in a Snowstorm* 273
323. Waldmüller: *The Shattered Rose* 274
324. Waldmüller: *The Picture Box Man* 275
325. Waldmüller: *Morning* 276
326. Bingham: *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* 277
327. Bingham: *The Wood Boat* 278
328. Bingham: *The County Election* 279
329. Hunt: *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* 281
330. Rossetti: *How Sir Galahad, Sir Bors & Sir Percival were fed, etc.* 282
331. Rossetti: *Jane Burden* 283
332. Rossetti: *Elizabeth Siddal* 283
333. Rossetti: *The Bride* 284
334. Paxton, architect: Transept of the Crystal Palace 285

Three Proposals for the completion of the Washington Monument:

335. Classical Project 286
336. "Modernized" English Gothic Project 286
337. "Modern French Renaissance . . ." Project 286

Four items from *The Art Journal Illustrated Catalog of the Great Exhibition, 1851.*

338. "Irish" Chair 287
339. Bedstead 287
340. Baby's Bed 287
341. Ornamental Razor 287
342. Morris: *La Belle Yseult* 289
343. Burne-Jones: *The Prioress' Tale* 289
344. Alma-Tadema: *A Reading from Homer* 290
345. Watts: *Hope* 290
346. Beardsley: "The Mysterious Rose Garden" 291
347. Hunt: *Awakening Conscience* 292
348. Millais: *Christ in the House of His Parents (The Carpenter's Shop)* 293
349. Millais: *Mr. James Wyatt and His Granddaughter Mary* 294
350. Frith: *Derby Day* 295
351. Frith: Detail from Figure 350 295

352. Frith: *Private View at the Royal Academy* 296
353. Whistler: *The White Girl* 297
354. Whistler: *Arrangement in Gray and Black (Whistler's Mother)* 298
355. Fildes: *The Doctor* 298
356. Whistler: *Miss Cicely Alexander* 299
357. Orpen: *Homage to Manet* 300
358. Feuerbach: *Nanna* 301
359. Feuerbach: *Orpheus and Eurydice* 301
360. Böcklin: *Spring* 302
361. Böcklin: *Sappho* 302
362. Böcklin: *Triton and Nereid* 303
363. Böcklin: *The Isle of the Dead* 304
364. Thoma: *Woodland Meadow* 305
365. Thoma: *Recollection of a Town in Umbria* 305
366. Leibl: *The Poachers* 306
367. Leibl: *The Poachers* before division into parts 306
368. Duveneck: *Georg von Hoesslin* 307
369. Sargent: *Mrs. Charles Gifford Dyer* 308
370. Sargent: *Simplon Pass: The Lesson* 308
371. Homer: *Gloucester Farm* 309
372. Homer: *Prisoners from the Front* 310
373. Homer: *The Life Line* 310
374. Homer: *The Hunter* 311
375. Homer: *Ship Unfurling Sails* 311
376. Eakins: *Masked Seated Nude* 312
377. Eakins: *Salutat* 313
378. Eakins: *Musicians Rehearsing* 314
379. Eakins: *Mrs. William D. Frishmuth* 314
380. Eakins: Detail from Figure 379 315
381. Eakins: Detail from Figure 379 315
382. Eakins: Detail from Figure 379 315
383. Eakins: *Miss Van Buren* 316
384. Sargent: *Mrs. Swinton* 316
385. Eakins: *Mending the Net* 317
386. Eakins: Detail from Figure 385 317
387. Eakins: *Max Schmitt in the Single Shell* 318
388. Eakins: *The Agnew Clinic* 319
389. Eakins: Detail from Figure 388 319
390. Eakins: *The Gross Clinic* 320
391. Sloan: *Greenwich Village Backyards* 321
392. Sloan: *The Wake of the Ferry* 321
393. Sloan: *"Professor—Please Play 'The Rosary'"* 322
394. Sloan: *Arachne* 322
395. Luks: *The Spielers* 323
396. Prendergast: *Afternoon, Pincian Hill, Rome* 323
397. Bellows: *A Stag at Sharkey's* 324
398. Bellows: *Elinor, Jean and Anna* 324
399. Seurat: *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* 328
400. Seurat: Detail from Figure 399 329
401. Seurat: *Male Nude* 330
402. Seurat: *Seated Woman* 330
403. Puvis de Chavannes: *The Poor Fisherman* 331
404. Seurat: *The Bridge at Courbevoie* 331

405. Pissarro: *River—Early Morning* 332
406. Seurat: *Une Baignade* 334
407. Seurat: *The Circus* 335
408. Toulouse-Lautrec: *In the Circus Fernando: The Ring Master* 335
409. Seurat: *La Parade* 336
410. Seurat: *Les Poseuses* (second version) 336
411. Seurat: *Le Chahut* (study) 337
412. Seurat: *La Poudreuse (Madeleine Knobloch)* 337
413. Signac: *The Port of St. Tropez* 338
414. Cézanne: *The Card Players* 342
415. Poussin: *Shepherds in Arcady* 343
416. Chardin: *Apples. Pear and White Mug* 344
417. Cézanne: *The White Sugar Bowl* 345
418. Cézanne: *Study after Houdon's "L'Écorché"* 346
419. Cézanne: *Man in a Blue Cap (Uncle Dominic)* 347
420. Cézanne: *The Artist's Father* 348
421. Cézanne: *Washing of a Corpse* 348
422. Cézanne: *Olympia* 349
423. Cézanne: *The House of the Hanged Man* 350
424. Cézanne: *View of Gardanne* 351
425. Cézanne: *L'Estaque and the Gulf of Marseilles* 352
426. Cézanne: *Still-life with Commode* 352
427. Cézanne: *Madame Cézanne* 353
428. Cézanne: *The Man in Blue* 353
429. Cézanne: *Mont Sainte-Victoire* 354
430. Cézanne: *Mont Sainte-Victoire from Les Lauves* 355
431. Cézanne: *Mont Sainte-Victoire from Bibemus Quarry* 355
432. Cézanne: *Landscape with Mont Sainte-Victoire* 356
433. Cézanne: *The Great Bathers* 357
434. Maillol: *Leda* 359
435. Daumier: *Clown* 361
436. Van Gogh: *The Starry Night* 362
437. Van Gogh: *The Potato Eaters* 365
438. Van Gogh: *Miners, Borinage* 366
439. Van Gogh: *Factories at Clichy* 367
440. Van Gogh: *Landscape with Wall* 367
441. Van Gogh: *Old Shoes* 368
442. Van Gogh: *Père Tanguy* 369
443. Van Gogh: *Self-portrait* 370
444. Van Gogh: *Dr. Gachet* 371
445. Van Gogh: *Public Gardens in Arles* 372
446. Van Gogh: *Sunflowers* 373
447. Van Gogh: *L'Arlésienne (Madame Ginoux)* 373
448. Van Gogh: *The Postman Roulin* 374
449. Van Gogh: *La Berceuse (Madame Roulin)* 375
450. Van Gogh: *The Road Menders* 376
451. Van Gogh: *Rain* 377
452. Van Gogh: *Stairway at Auvers* 377
453. Gauguin: *The Vision after the Sermon—Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* 378
454. Gauguin: *Women in a Garden* 379
455. Gauguin: *L'Arlésienne (Madame Ginoux)* 379
456. Gauguin: *Self-portrait with Halo* 380
457. Gauguin: *Portrait of a Woman* 380

458. Gauguin: *Ia Orana Maria* 382
459. Gauguin: *Manao Tupapau—The Spirit of the Dead Watching* 383
460. Gauguin: *Hina Te Fatou—The Moon and the Earth* 384
461. Gauguin: *Poèmes Barbares* 384
462. Gauguin: *Whence Come We? What Are We? Whither Go We?* 385
463. Puvis de Chavannes: *The Sacred Grove* 385
464. Vuillard: *Le Repas* 386
465. Bonnard: *After the Shower* 388
466. Bonnard: *Bowl of Fruit* 388
467. Redon: *Vase of Flowers* 389
468. Redon: *Revery* 389
469. Rousseau (H.): *Village Street Scene* 391
470. Rousseau (H.): *The Young Girl* 392
471. Rousseau (H.): *The Dream* 393
472. Rousseau (H.): *The Sleeping Gypsy* 394
473. Moreau: *The Apparition (Dance of Salome)* 399
474. Heem: *Still-life* 400
475. Matisse: *Variation on a Still-life by de Heem* 401
476. Matisse: *La Desserte* 401
477. Matisse: *The Slave* 402
478. Rodin: Study for a monument to Balzac 402
479. Matisse: *La Coiffure* 403
480. Matisse: *Olive Trees, Collioure* 403
481. Matisse: *Madame Matisse (The Green Line)* 404
482. Matisse: *Blue Nude* 405
483. Matisse: *Reclining Nude I* 405
484. Derain: *Henri Matisse* 406
485. Derain: *The Artist's Niece* 406
486. Derain: *Le Mas Provençal* 407
487. Vlaminck: *Village in the Snow* 408
488. Marquet: *Docks at Hamburg* 408
489. Dufy: *Racetrack at Deauville* 409
490. Dufy: *Threshing with a Blue Machine* 409
491. Rouault: *The Sirens* 410
492. Rouault: *Tragic Clowns* 411
493. Rouault: *Crucifixion* 412
494. Rouault: *Pierrot with a Rose* 412
495. Rouault: *Dura Lex Sed Lex (Harsh Law, but Law)* 413
496. Matisse: Study for *Dance* 414
497. Matisse: *Mlle. Yvonne Landsberg* 414
498. Matisse: *White Plumes* 415
499. Matisse: *The Piano Lesson* 415
500. Matisse: *The Moorish Screen* 416
501. Matisse: *Decorative Figure on an Ornamental Background* 417
502. Matisse: *Nude by a Window* 417
503. Matisse: *Lady in Blue* 418
504. Matisse: Progressive stages of Figure 503 419
505. Matisse: *The Knife Thrower* 419
506. Matisse: *Girl in a Low Cut Dress* 420
507. Matisse: *Three Friends* 421
508. Rodin: *Imploration* 421
509. Hodler: *The Night* 422
510. Munch: *Anxiety* 423

511. Ensor: *Entry of Christ into Brussels in 1889* 424
512. Ensor: *Skeletons Trying to Warm Themselves* 425
513. Ensor: *Self-portrait with Masks* 425
514. Nolde: *Life of Maria Aegyptiaca,* First Episode 426
515. Schmidt-Rottluff: *Way to Emmaus* 426
516. Gauguin: *Manao Tupapau* 427
517. Heckel: *Portrait of a Man* 428
518. Kirchner: *The Street* 428
519. Barlach: *Man Drawing a Sword* 429
520. Kandinsky: *Improvisation* 430
521. Kandinsky: *Geometrical Forms* 431
522. Kandinsky: *Fish Form* 432
523. Jawlensky: *Looking Within—Night* 432
524. Feininger: *The Steamer Odin, II* 433
525. Dix: *Meeting a Madman at Night* 433
526. Grosz: *Fit for Active Service* 434
527. Grosz: *Street Scene* 434
528. Grosz: *Maid Arranging Hair of Corpulent Woman* 435
529. Grosz: Detail from Figure 528 435
530. Von Marées: *Man with the Standard* 436
531. Beckmann: *Departure* 437
532. Kokoschka: *The Tempest (The Wind's Bride)* 438
533. Kokoschka: *View of the Thames* 439
534. Kollwitz: *Death and the Mother* 440
535. Modigliani: *Self-portrait* 441
536. Modigliani: *Head* 441
537. Lehmbruck: *Standing Woman* 442
538. Lehmbruck: *Kneeling Woman* 442
539. Marin: *The Singer Building* 443
540. Marin: *Lower Manhattan* 444
541. Homer: *Northeaster* 444
542. Hartley: *Hurricane Island, Vinal Haven, Maine* 445
543. Marin: *Off York Island, Maine* 445
544. Gropper: *For the Record* 446
545. Watkins: *Suicide in Costume* 446
546. Soutine: *Portrait of Kisling* 447
547. Soutine: Detail from Figure 546 447
548. De Kooning: *Detour* 448
549. Guston: *The Painter's City* 449
550. Picasso: Drawing from a cast 451
551. Picasso: *Old Woman* 451
552. Picasso: *Harlequin Propped on Elbow* 451
553. Picasso: *The Old Guitarist* 452
554. Picasso: *La Toilette* 452
555. Picasso: *Boy with Bouquet* 453
556. Picasso: *Boy Leading a Horse* 453
557. Picasso: *Woman with Loaves* 454
558. Picasso: *Gertrude Stein* 454
559. Picasso: *Self-portrait* 455
560. Picasso: *Les Desmoiselles d'Avignon* 456
561. Braque: *Road near L'Estaque* 457
562. Metzinger: *Tea Time* 457
563. Picasso: *Female Nude* 458

564. Picasso: *Seated Nude Woman* 458
565. Lipchitz: *Girl with a Braid* 459
566. Lipchitz: *Half Standing Figure* 459
567. Gris: *Dish of Fruit* 460
568. Gris: *The Open Window* 460
569. Gris: *Man at Café* (study) 461
570. Gris: *The Violin* 462
571. Léger: *Three Figures* 462
572. Léger: *Contrast of Forms* 463
573. Léger: *The City* 464
574. Léger: *The Breakfast* (study) 464
575. Léger: *Divers on Yellow Background* 465
576. Léger: *Leisure* 466
577. Cassandre: *L'Intran* 466
578. Delaunay: *Eiffel Tower, c.* 1909 467
579. Delaunay: *Eiffel Tower, c.* 1925 467
580. Delaunay: *Windows* 468
581. Picabia: *Physical Culture* 468
582. Duchamp: *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* 469
583. Burne-Jones: *The Golden Stairs* 469
584. Balla: *Leash in Motion* 470
585. Russolo: *Dynamism of an Automobile* 471
586. Severini: *Dynamic Hieroglyphic of the Bal Tabarin* 472
587. Bernini: *Apollo and Daphne* 473
588. Boccioni: *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* 473
589. Carrà: *Hermaphroditic Idol* 474
590. Picasso: *Man with Violin* 474
591. Braque: *Man with Guitar* 475
592. Braque: *Musical Forms with the Words Fête and Journal* 475
593. Braque: *Musical Forms* 476
594. Braque: *The Round Table* 477
595. Braque: *Nude* 478
596. Braque: *Woman with Mandolin* 479
597. Picasso: *Harlequin* 480
598. Picasso: *Painter and Model* 481
599. Picasso: *Three Musicians* 482
600. Picasso: *Three Musicians* 482
601. Picasso: *Standing Nude* 483
602. Picasso: *Woman in White* 483
603. Picasso: *Girl before a Mirror* 483
604. Picasso: *Minotauromachia* 484
605. Picasso: *Guernica* 485
606. Picasso: Composition study for Figure 605 485
607. Picasso: Detail from Figure 605 486
608. Picasso: Detail from Figure 605 486
609. Picasso: Detail from Figure 605 487
610. Picasso: Detail from Figure 605 487
611. Picasso: *Guernica Series #37* 488
612. Picasso: *Girl with Cock* 488
613. Picasso: *Women of Algiers, Variation "L"* 488
614. Picasso: *Women of Algiers, Variation "N"* 488
615. Malevich: *White on White* 489
616. Mondrian: *Landscape with Farmhouse* 490

617. Mondrian: *Composition with Yellow* 491
618. Mondrian: *Rhythm in Straight Lines* 492
619. Mondrian: *Broadway Boogie Woogie* 492
620. Mondrian: *Composition No. 10, Plus and Minus* 493
621. Mondrian: *Horizontal Tree* 493
622. Le Corbusier: *Still-life* 494
623. Nicholson: *Relief* 494
624. Morandi: *Still-life* 495
625. Le Corbusier, architect: Savoye House 495
626. Brancusi: *Bird in Space* 496
627. Brancusi: *Sculpture for the Blind* 497
628. Brancusi: *The Kiss* 497
629. Gabo: *Linear Construction* 498
630. Moore: *Reclining Figure* 499
631. Moore: *Internal and External Forms* 500
632. Boccioni: *Development of a Bottle in Space* 501
633. Calder: *Horizontal Spines* 501
634. Rivera: *Head of a Woman* 503
635. Posada: *Calvera Huertista* 503
636. East Coast, Mexico: *Head* 504
637. Rivera: *Liberation of the Peon* 505
638. Rivera: *The Blood of Martyrs Enriches the Earth* 506
639. Rivera: *Sugar Cane* 506
640. South wall of court of Detroit Institute of Arts, with frescoes by Rivera 507
641. Orozco: *Barricade* 508
642. Orozco: *Gods of the Modern World* 509
643. Orozco: *Cortez and the Cross, and the Machine* 510
644. Siqueiros: *War* 511
645. Tamayo: *Women of Tehuantepec* 511
646. Bellows: *Benediction in Georgia* 512
647. Curry: *Baptism in Kansas* 513
648. Benton: *Louisiana Rice Fields* 514
649. Wood: *American Gothic* 515
650. Dix: *Dr. Mayer-Hermann* 515
651. Wood: *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* 516
652. Marsh: *They Pay to Be Seen* 516
653. Burchfield: *Backyards in Spring* 517
654. Hopper: *Early Sunday Morning* 517
655. Shahn: *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* 518
656. Shahn: *Epoch* 518
657. Shahn: *"Nearly Everybody Reads The Bulletin"* 519
658. Shahn: *Silent Music* 520
659. Dali: *Agnostic Symbol* 521
660. Dali: *The Persistence of Memory* 522
661. Bruegel: *Allegory of Gluttony* 523
662. Dali: *Geopoliticus* 524
663. Duchamp: *Why Not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* 525
664. Duchamp: *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* 525
665. Schwitters: *Merz Konstruktion* 526
666. Harnett: *The Old Violin* 526
667. Arp: *Two Heads* 527
668. Arp: *Composition* 527
669. Chirico: *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* 528

670. Chirico: *The Soothsayer's Recompense* 529
671. Chirico: *The Philosopher* 530
672. Chirico: *The Poet and His Muse* 531
673. Chagall: *Bouquet with Flying Lovers* 532
674. Chagall: *In the Night* 533
675. Chagall: *I and My Village* 533
676. Chagall: *The Poet, or Half Past Three* 533
677. Tanguy: *Shadow Country* 534
678. Miró: *Dog Barking at the Moon* 535
679. Miró: *Painting* 536
680. Klee: *Landscape with Blue Birds* 536
681. Klee: *Jörg* 537
682. Klee: *But the Red Roof* 537
683. Klee: *Diana* 538
684. Matta: *The Earth Is a Man* 539
685. Picasso: *Dinard* 540
686. Picasso: *Baboon and Young* 540
687. Albright: *Into the World There Came a Soul Called Ida* 540
688. Graves: *Guardian* 541
689. Berman: *Bridges of Paris* 541
690. Tchelitchew: *Hide-and-Seek* 542
691. Wyeth: *Christina Olsen* 543
692. Gropius: The *Bauhaus* 546
693. Gropius: The *Bauhaus* Workshop Wing 546
694. Miës van der Rohe: Tugendhat House 548
695. Miës van der Rohe: Seagram Building 549
696. Wright: Taliesen 550
697. Wright: Johnson Wax Company buildings 551
698. Wright: Interior of Administration Building, Johnson Wax Company 551
699. Nervi: Exhibition Hall, Turin, Italy 552
700. Utzon: Opera House, Sydney, Australia 553

PART I

The Nineteenth Century in France

CHAPTER 1

Revolution

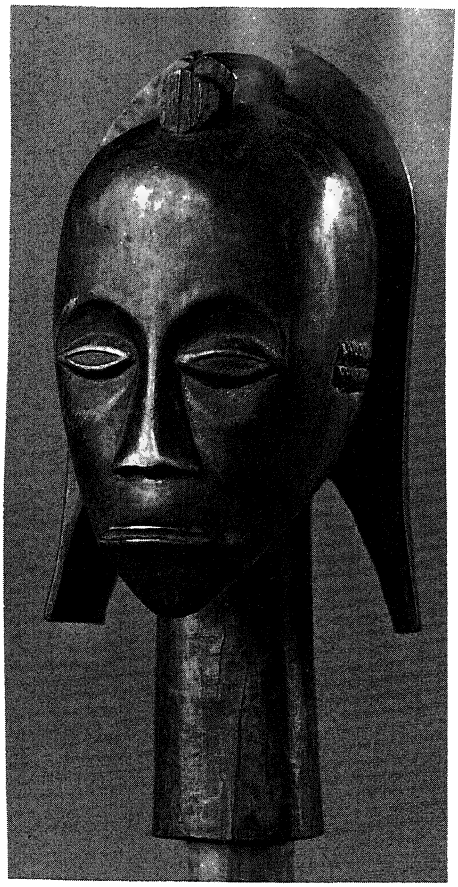
Modern Art, Tradition, and David

Where does modern art begin? And why does this version of its story begin with a man named Jacques Louis David, born more than 200 years ago?

Modern art begins nowhere because it begins everywhere. It is fed by a thousand roots, from cave paintings 30,000 years old to the spectacular novelties in last week's exhibitions. We are pressed upon by bewildering accumulations of every art from every period; a painter may live in South Dakota and find his major stimulation in the sculpture of ancient China. His art may be a compound of his reactions to objects and ideas as diverse as the structure of the internal combustion engine, the theories of Sigmund Freud, and the painting of Rembrandt. The public museum is something new; we think of it as having always existed, but it is a modern institution, and what the old masters knew of the art of the past was only a fraction of what any casual student can see today in museums—and cannot avoid seeing in floods of reproductions that have added their special complication by taking the Sistine Ceiling, for instance, and transforming it into a miniature painting the size of an ordinary envelope.

For the artist, the past used to be a stream; now it is an ocean. It used to be a road, now it is a forest. Tradition in art used to mean a steady sequence of change within boundaries. Today the boundaries are vague, if they exist at all. Horizons are infinite; the artist is tempted to explore in a hundred directions at once.

As an example more obvious than most, the art of the modern Italian painter Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920) reflects in

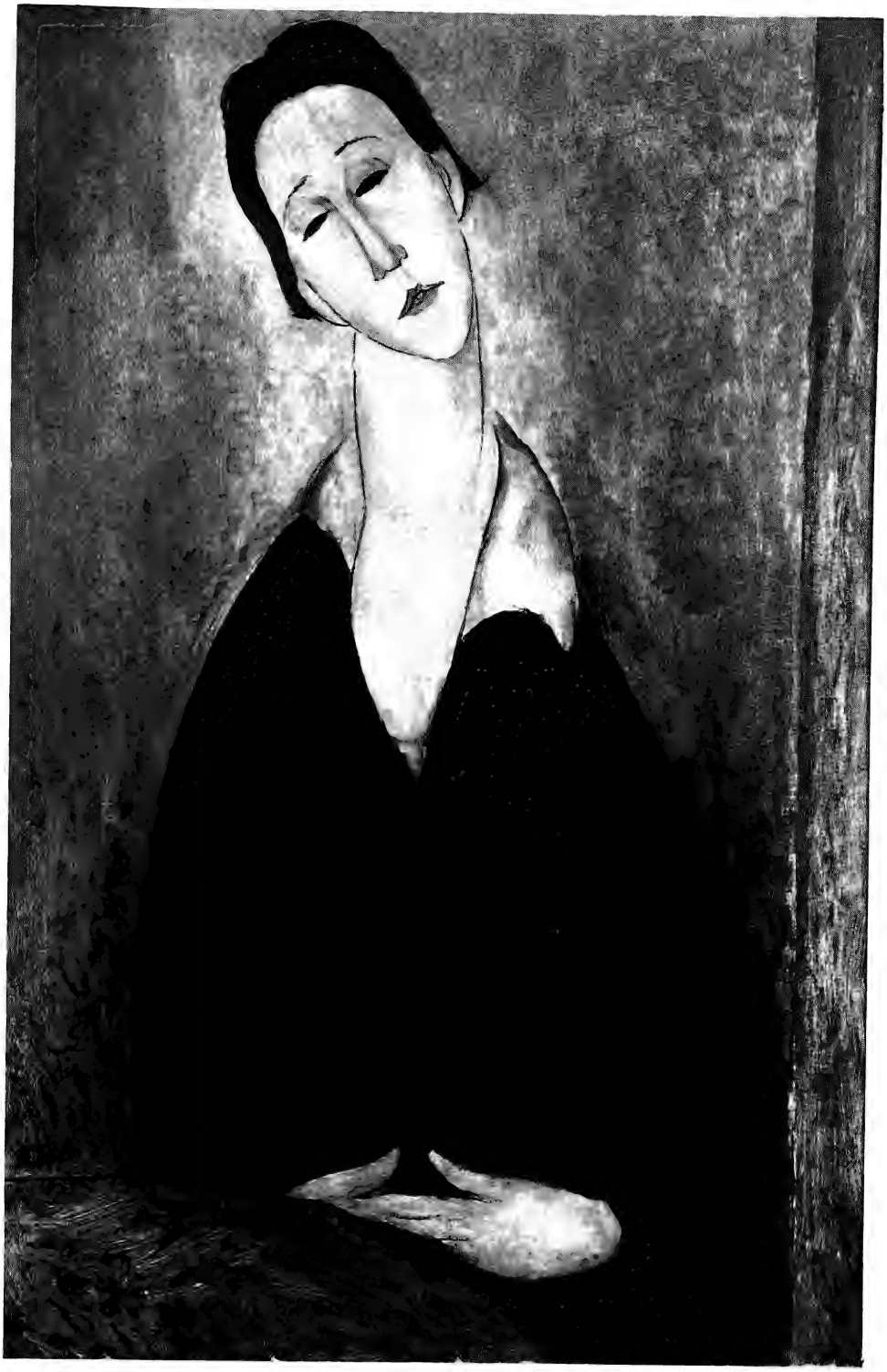


1. Belgian Congo: *Head.* Wood, 13¾" high. University Museum, Philadelphia.

2. Botticelli: Detail from *Birth of Venus, c.* 1485. Uffizi, Florence. (Photo Anderson.)

about equal parts the wonderful linear contours of his compatriot of nearly 500 years before, Botticelli, and the stylizations of African tribal sculpture. African sculpture [1] is part of the savage ritual of magic and incantation. Botticelli's Venus [2] is a Renaissance intellectual's revery upon classical antiquity. Yet these two arts, so wildly separated, are harmoniously unified in another that is concerned with the Parisian bohemia of the early twentieth century [3]. Half a dozen other influences contributed to Modigliani's painting, quite aside from the infinite number that are bound into it in secondary ways. They would include the French classical master, Ingres; Modigliani's contemporaries, the expressionists; probably the late medieval religious paintings of the Sienese school; the revolutionary art of Cézanne; the *fin-de-siècle* art of Toulouse-Lautrec. But the most important factor in the compound of Modigliani's art is not Botticelli or African sculpture. Nor is it Ingres or the expressionists or the Sienese or Cézanne or Toulouse-Lautrec. It is Modigliani, an artist of creative talent, sensitive intelligence, and aesthetic discretion, who imitates none of these men or schools but fuses whatever he takes from them with his own perception of the world into an expressive art of great individuality.

We talk about "traditional" painting today, meaning the opposite of "modern" painting. Yet if tradition means the transmission of ideas or ways of doing things from ancestors to posterity—as the diction-



3. MODIGLIANI: *Female Portrait*, 1918. 39½ x 25½". Collection Louis E. Stern, New York.

ary says it does—then Modigliani must be one of the most traditional painters who ever lived. But, like other modern artists, he has found his ancestors in the most diverse and unexpected combinations. The orderly sequence from one generation of painters to the next has given way to a series of abrupt dislocations to such an extent that, if we have a tradition, it is the contradictory one that each new generation is under some kind of obligation to refute and violate the ideas of the preceding one.

For this reason Jacques Louis David offers a starting point for this story of modern art. He cut off from a long tradition to begin a new one, and he cut off so suddenly, with such violence even, that the course of painting ever since has been a history of revolutions and counterrevolutions, developing so rapidly that one is hardly established before it is being shouldered aside by the next. As successive groups of painters seek to establish a norm within this infinitely rich chaos, other groups arise, determined to upset whatever norm is temporarily achieved. The history of modern painting begins with David's break from tradition just as the history of modern Europe begins with the French Revolution, in which David was a conspicuous figure.

David's Life

As often as not, a knowledge of the events of a painter's life is unnecessary to understanding his art, but David's is one of those cases where some acquaintance is imperative. Early disappointments, an attempted suicide, a Roman experience, and thereafter his participation in the turbulent political events of his time not only determined the character of his own art but redirected the course of European painting. During twenty years of roaring success, David painted a series of sensational pictures that annihilated not only every living competitor of the old school but the tradition of the most eminent painters for several generations back as well. He established himself as art dictator of France, where his paintings influenced everything from philosophical morality to interior decoration. Political theorists used his paintings to support their arguments, and every woman in Europe with any pretensions to chic discarded her wardrobe and changed her hair-do to make herself over in the pattern of the female type he invented to enact his pictorial dramas. It was the most drastic "new look" in the history of fashion, but it was only a footnote to David's career.

As a student David was a protegé of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, an institution that he would later cut down, then make over in his own image. He attempted suicide after four consecutive failures to win its *Prix de Rome*. This "Rome Prize" was (and still is) the most coveted official student award in France. It took the winner to the Academy's branch in Rome for three years; during this time his only obligation was to produce one work annually to send back to Paris. A *Prix de Rome* man was also assured of very considerable advantages upon his return to France, since his career was sponsored by established academicians in a position to throw commissions and attention his way. The whole situation, of course, was based on the premise that a *Prix de Rome* winner was dedicated to the perpetuation of the academic tradition.

David failed in his suicide when fellow students broke into his studio in the Louvre, suspicious because it had been locked for days. (The Louvre was not then a museum; the buildings included, among many other things, quarters for the talented young men who, like David, received stipends from the king to follow their studies.) He had intended to starve himself to death and probably would have done so. The choice of method says a great deal about David's temperament, at once intense and dogged, sensitive yet Spartan. These characteristics appear in his art, where emotion is held in check by icy control.

In 1774 David competed once again for the *Prix de Rome* and won it. He was twenty-six years old, unusually mature for a *Prix de Rome* winner and—which was even more unusual—full of hidden resentment against the Academy and suspicious of its standards.

4. DAVID: *Marie Antoinette on the Way to Execution,* 1793. Pen and ink, 5¾ x 4". Louvre, Paris.

By a unique extension of artistic success into the field of government, possible only in the one country in the world where art is debated as fervently as politics, the pictures David painted during the next fifteen years lifted him from the position of a near-failure to the eminence of the Revolution's prophet and then made him one of its leading participants. (Just how this happened we will see when we look at the pictures themselves.) He served among other capacities as a member of the legislative body voting life or death for his former patron, Louis XVI. David's vote was among those that sent this ineffectual, confused, and incompetent young man to the guillotine. David also guillotined the Royal Academy in which he had been nurtured, crying out for its abolition "in the name of humanity, in the name of justice, for the love of art, and above all for the love of youth." He called the Academy's schools *funeste,* an adjective that pales in translation as *fatal* or *deadly.* Fatal or deadly they may have been, but a few years after David abolished them they rose from their own ashes, more *funeste* than ever, dominated this time by the theories of David himself.

The Revolution was followed by the period of violence and confusion so appropriately called the Terror, when no man's neck was safe from the knife. During these days David, still among the powerful, abandoned personal friends to the executioner with an expedient callousness for which he has never been forgiven. Some of his actions at this time make it difficult not to see him as a fanatic. Mrs. Siddons, the English actress, reported to a friend that she was present when David, told that eighty people had been beheaded that morning, answered, "Not more?" He used to sit outside the *Café de la Régence* sketching the prisoners on their way to the scaffold. When Marie Antoinette was beheaded, he did a heartrending sketch of her [4], bound hand and foot as he saw her from a window on the way to execution, bedraggled, emaciated, prematurely aged by her frightful imprisonment, with no suggestion of beauty left, yet with a dignity she had never managed to achieve as queen of France.

This man David was a curious personality, given to passionate loyalties and passionate grudges, a man of fervent temperament who imposed upon himself a frigid manner, of sensitive perceptions which he rejected as unworthy. Because his career and his art are full of contradictions, his biographers have taken sides according to their own convictions. Some see in him a bloodthirsty despot never forgiving the men who for so long had denied him the *Prix de Rome,* using his power vengefully to destroy the tradition they represented. Others find him devoted to high principles, even if a little prone to inflict them on others as severely as he imposed them upon himself. Frequently the same facts support either judgment, since they must be evaluated in the unnatural lights of the Revolution and the Terror.

Despot or idealist, David himself narrowly escaped the guillotine. He fell from power with his Jacobin partner Robespierre, whose terrorist excesses had become intolerable. Robespierre was beheaded. But there was a delay before David came to trial; when he did, his defense was that he had never been sympathetic to Robespierre's policies, that he had strung along with him only to give what service and protection he could to the arts of France. It is recorded that he "sweated enormously" on the witness stand, that he was pale and trembling, mumbling and stammering pitifully in his own defense against the murderous oratory of the prosecutor, one of the finest speakers of the day. It is not surprising that a man in danger of his life, with no reason to expect clemency, should sweat, nor is it damning that, in the circumstances, one should mumble whose upper lip was disfigured, as David's was, with a tumor that impeded his speech even in the happiest situations. In any case, David escaped execution. Instead, he was imprisoned.

But for this extraordinary man even the circumstances of prison were exceptional and rebounded ultimately to his advantage. His cell was a room in the Luxembourg Palace overlooking a corner of some of the loveliest gardens in the world. The family governess made daily trips to the palace gardens where David's children played as he watched from his window. Former students kept him supplied with painting materials, and he began work on sketches for one of his most ambitious pictures, *The Battle of the Romans and Sabines* [11], a work that was to re-establish him more firmly than ever in a career which seemed lost. When he was released in a general amnesty, he had been in prison only a few months.

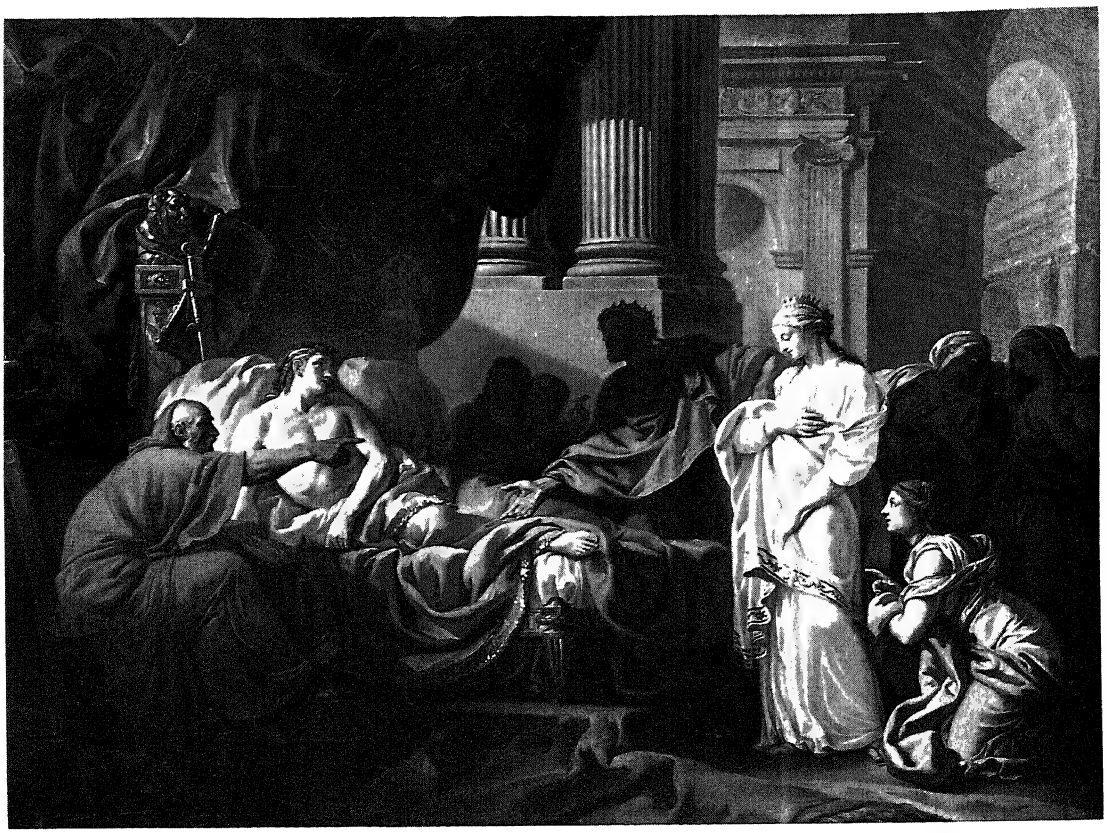
David completed *The Sabines* in a studio where women of fashion begged to pose for him as if they already knew the picture was to be one of the most famous in the world. In the meanwhile France had come under the leadership of the young general Napoleon Bonaparte. He visited David's studio to see *The Sabines* and recognized the potential of this man's art as propaganda that could be as effective for the empire he planned as it had been for the Revolution. Napoleon conceived an image of himself as a modern version of a conquering Roman emperor, partly because of his personal conviction that he was just that and partly as a matter of what would now be called public relations. Official architecture had been a recombination of classical elements under the dictates of the Royal Academy, but now Napoleon demanded an architecture that would be true archaeologically. Paris was to become a second Rome—but larger—as a setting for the new conqueror. For his church, La Madeleine, Napoleon demanded of his architects the most perfect classical temple since antiquity. The Arc de Triomphe is a handsomely inflated version of ancient Roman models, so large that the originals would look like guard stalls alongside it. David's painting was the perfect accessory to these conceptions, and Napoleon took the artist under his wing.

Thus the young man who had begun his career under the patronage of the king of France, who had continued it as spokesman for the Revolution and the Terror, finally became First Painter to the Emperor and art dictator of the country that has set the course of Western painting ever since.

Napoleon once said, "David, I salute you." He was commenting on a painting, recognizing its success without risking a critical judgment. But the same comment, with the same reservation, could refer in all appropriateness to David's life.

David's Painting

David won his *Prix de Rome* with a respectful exercise giving no indication—except by hindsight—of the Davidian revolution to come. *Antiochus and Stratonice* [5] is full of derivative references flattering to the leading academicians of the day. Like any other student involved in a school competition, David produced a demonstration of how well he had learned his lessons. The picture includes a nude torso to prove that he knew muscular anatomy and could draw and paint the human body accurately with conventional heroic modifications; his skill with drapery is demonstrated to the point



5. DAVID: *Antiochus and Stratonice*, 1774 (*Prix de Rome*). 47¼ x 61". *École des Beaux Arts*, Paris. (Photo Giraudon.)

of excess in great billowing areas wherever he needs filler; the male figure leaning forward just to the right of the picture's center, reduced almost to silhouette in the head and shoulders and emerging into brilliant illumination in the hand and the spread of cloak just below, is a sort of final examination passed with honors in chiaroscuro, which means the revelation of forms in strong light and dark shadow. The elaborated architectural background shows that the candidate had mastered perspective, and also supplies the air of pomp and circumstance necessary to a picture obliged to take itself so seriously. Compositionally—that is, in the way the objects and figures are arranged in the picture space—these various exercises are nicely, if conventionally, pieced together.

The story, for whatever bearing it has, tells of the young prince Antiochus (supine upon the couch) who languished to the point of death from an unidentifiable malady until the doctor Erasistratus (seated beside him, at the left) diagnosed it for what it was: Antiochus was lovesick for his father's wife, the beautiful Stratonice (standing at the right). Such a tale of repressed passion offers material for tense and personal expression—and received it, later on, in a painting by one of David's own pupils [67]—but David uses it only as a framework for a charade posed by models in appropriate attitudes. But hindsight shows us that, if most of the picture is blowzy and pointlessly complicated, the figure of Erasistratus has an aggressive force in which we can imagine the germ of the style of the picture that redirected the course of French painting and began the history of modern art—David's *The Oath of the Horatii.*

"The Oath of the Horatii"

With *The Oath of the Horatii* [6], which he completed in 1785, David came fully into his own as an original creative painter. It is a superb picture. It is called stiff and cold; such adjectives as *harsh* and *wiry* are habitually applied to its color and drawing, with only partial justice, as if they were entirely derogatory. Actually these qualities are in themselves remarkable, and they have an expressive reason for being.

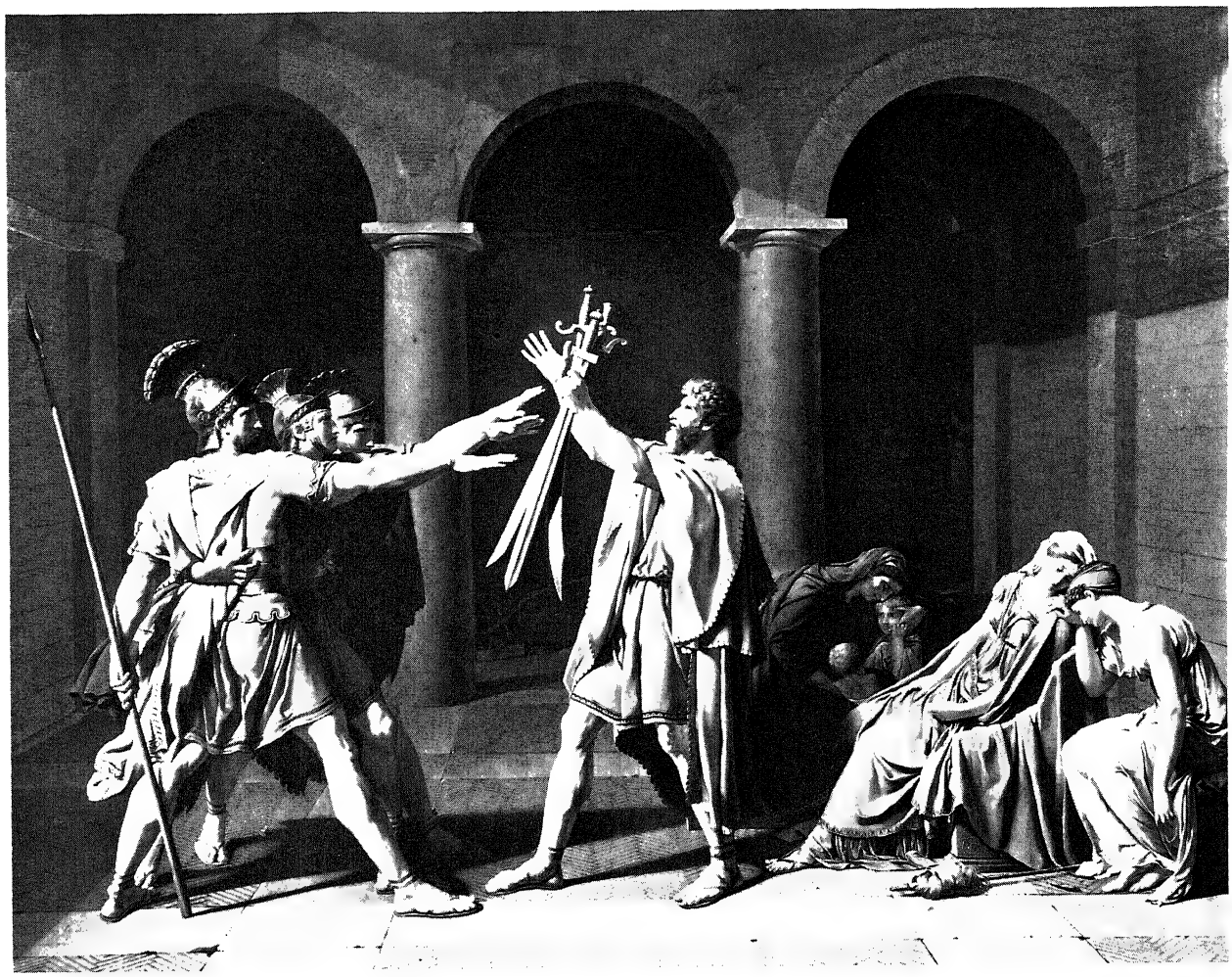
The Oath of the Horatii contrasts on every hand with *Antiochus and Stratonice*. Its surface is as hard as enamel, the edges of its forms are mercilessly uncompromising, revealed in a flat, uniform illumination instead of theatrical spotlights. In drapery passages the windy profligacy of the earlier picture has been chastened into order and definition. Everywhere the antithesis continues. Compositionally, *Antiochus and Stratonice* is extravagant; *The Oath of the Horatii* is spare, organized almost mathematically into unit variations of the number 3. Against three simple arches the participants are divided into three groups of generally triangular shapes—the three sons, the father holding their three swords, and the group of women. In this last group the triangular severity is appropriately relaxed (but not abandoned), and the linear patterns are appropriately more graceful. The three groups, considered as a unit, are united in a final triangle binding the picture into a decisive whole. The subterfuge of the "academic machine," which means a picture organized on standard formulas with all their complicated trappings, has been rejected for a rigid structure where economy, precision, and force must reveal any weak or extraneous element. *The Oath of the Horatii* offers the artist no refuge behind the facile piling-up of incidentals; he must be revealed as the master of his expression or be exposed as inadequate to its demands.

That David invented a new style of painting need not have had any importance in itself; the important thing is that he had to invent it in order to express what amounted to a moral and philosophical revolution in art, which also explains his choice of subject. The three stalwart young Romans are vowing to their father that they will return victorious or give their lives in a duel with three warrior brothers of the city of Alba, a duel to be fought in the presence of the armies of both cities to determine which city will rule the other. The special complication in this situation is that one of the grieving women to the right is not only the wife of one of the Roman warriors but the sister of one of the Albans as well. In addition, the youngest of the women is a sister of the Romans but the fiancée of one of the Albans.

Thus the subject of *The Oath of the Horatii* is dedication and sacrifice. Instead of the lovesick Antiochus we have vigorous young males pledging their lives to the defense of their honor, their family, and their country. The chaste matron and the swooning girl express their grief with admirable reserve, submissive to the will of the dominant men. Their dignity is a rebuke to Stratonice's simpering grace, just as the virility of the young Horatii is contemptuous of Antiochus's amorous languor. Service to a moral and social ideal is glorified as a virtue opposed to its parallel vice, the indulgence of personal yearnings. Just so, severity and masculine force replace elegance and feminine sensitivity in David's new style. Rich complications have given way to austerity; fashionable invention has been rejected for philosophical order.

Composition of this kind is not achieved in a single step; the rule in picture-making is that simplicity is reached by reduction from complexity. When he first began work, David chose another incident from the story of the Horatii as dramatized by Corneille, the god of French classical drama. In this tragedy the three Albans and two of the Roman brothers are killed; the remaining son returns covered with the blood of his sister's fiancé, and she denounces him and Rome. As a patriot, he runs his sister through with his sword.

An early sketch for the picture represents this final scene, where the elder Horatius pleads for his son while the body of his daughter lies on the steps of the platform where they stand. The composition was to have been even more elaborate than

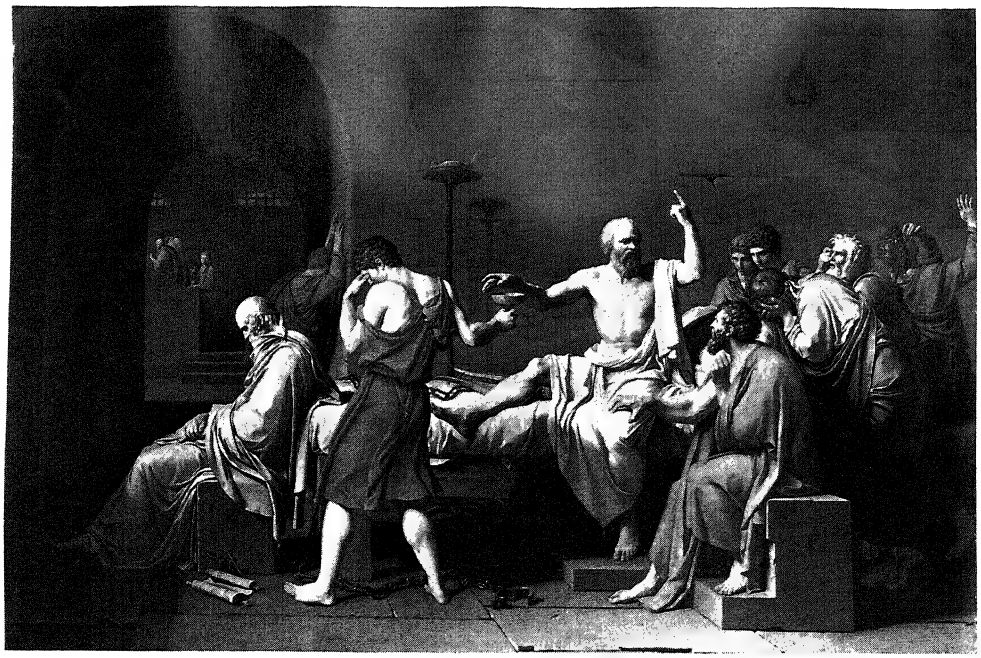


6. DAVID: *The Oath of the Horatii,* small version, after 1784. 50 x 65". Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey.

Antiochus and Stratonice. The old father, swathed in a toga, gestures grandiloquently in one direction while two male figures rush past him in another. The son stands in elaborate theatrical battle gear, including a voluminous cape. The background was to have been a palatial architectural invention on several levels, rising above masses of incidental figures in the foreground and supporting other agitated groups on a balcony. For good measure, there was to have been a full landscape in the distance, including a large temple.

Such a fulsome arrangement was out of key with the ideal of sincerity and moral strength, and David abandoned it (perhaps upon the advice of friends) for the scene showing the sons taking their oath before departure. The palace in the background was reduced to a stark enclosure; the landscape was eliminated as having nothing to do with the action; costumes were simplified. The new composition was less obviously dramatic but more forceful, and with the narrative reduced to a minimum its symbolism was emphasized.

The Oath of the Horatii was a sensation when David exhibited it in his studio in Rome. He completed it there during a second sojourn made possible by his father-in-law, who supplied him with funds to support himself, his wife and family, and an

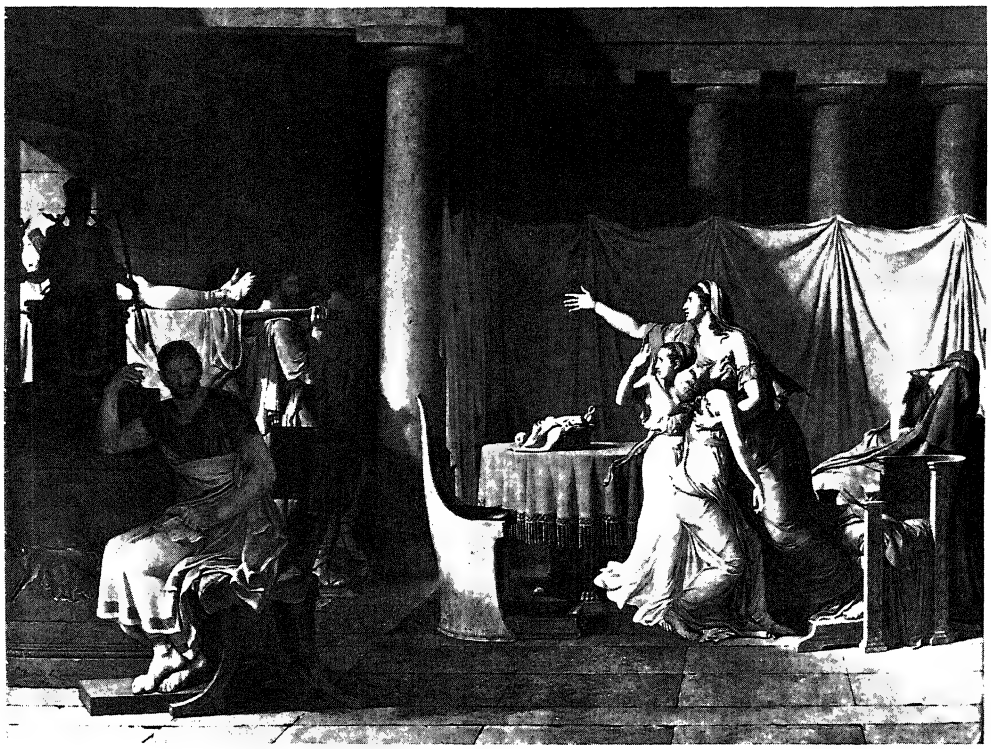


7. DAVID: *The Death of Socrates,* 1787. 51 x 77¼". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Wolfe Fund.

entourage of servants and assistants. The investment was a good one. The picture was brought back to Paris for the Salon (the annual official exhibition dominated by the Academy) and although badly placed, it caused such riotous excitement that it was rehung in a better position. A few pedants criticized the composition as oversimplified and on a single plane—that is, stretching across the picture surface rather than, so to speak, "puncturing" the canvas and going back into space. But these objections were lost in the general enthusiasm, which was increased by a factor that was to affect the reception of David's work from this time on: *The Oath of the Horatii* was interpreted as an allegory of contemporary events.

To adherents of the burgeoning Revolution, the picture seemed to proclaim the virility of new republican ideals in opposition to the degeneracy of the old regime. It is impossible to know how specifically David meant to reflect political convictions or theories, but it is certain enough that his own temperament was sympathetic to the new ideas—or at least unsympathetic to the established order, of which the Academy was a manifestation. With the explosive success of *The Horatii* David became identified with antiroyalist thought. Ironically, the picture had been commissioned by the king. And it was so admired by one high-living member of the court, the Comte de Vaudreuil, an intimate of Marie Antoinette, that he commissioned David to do a copy in a smaller size. (He had to sell it later to pay gambling debts.) The smaller version is illustrated here. It differs from the larger one in the Louvre by the addition of the spindle lying on the floor by the grieving women.

David followed *The Horatii* with an even icier painting reflecting again the theme of self-sacrifice with moral and philosophical associations translatable into terms of revolutionary political ideas, *The Death of Socrates* [7]. The philosopher whose thought was based on the idea of studying man instead of inventing systems of false rhetoric, who sought the moral bases for human conduct, who did his teaching where crowds of the people gathered instead of within a



8. DAVID: *Lictors Bringing Back to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons*, 1789. 128 x 166½". Louvre, Paris.

closed circle of sophisticates, and who died for the defense of his ideas, was even more directly identifiable with the principles of the Revolution than *The Horatii* had been. David shows Socrates about to carry out the sentence of death by drinking hemlock, while his disciples do their best to conceal the weakness of emotionalism.

These "stoic" pictures with political overtones reached their climax—not aesthetically, but politically—in a picture of Brutus, First Consul of Rome, sternly repressing his grief as the bodies of his two sons, whom he had condemned to death for conspiring against Roman liberty, are carried home for burial. *Lictors Bringing Back to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* [8] was completed and exhibited the very year of the Revolution. Even more than *The Horatii* it was a sensation as a political allegory. Just as Brutus had sacrificed his own sons to the cause of Roman liberty, so must the French people purify their country at no matter what costs. Brutus's strength was openly compared with the weakness of Louis XVI, who had allowed members of his family to emigrate and take up arms for other countries against France. Again the pedants objected, this time because the figure of Brutus, the main character, was thrown into deep shadow. The dramatic and psychological effectiveness of this device is obvious, of course, but it went against the rules. No one else cared; the picture was a fantastic success, talked of everywhere, and in the theater where Voltaire's drama on the same subject was being performed, the actors assumed the attitudes painted by David. *Brutus*, too, was purchased by Louis XVI. David's apologists point out that later on, when he voted for the death of the King, David could not have done otherwise without giving the lie to the moral themes of *The Horatii* and *Brutus*.

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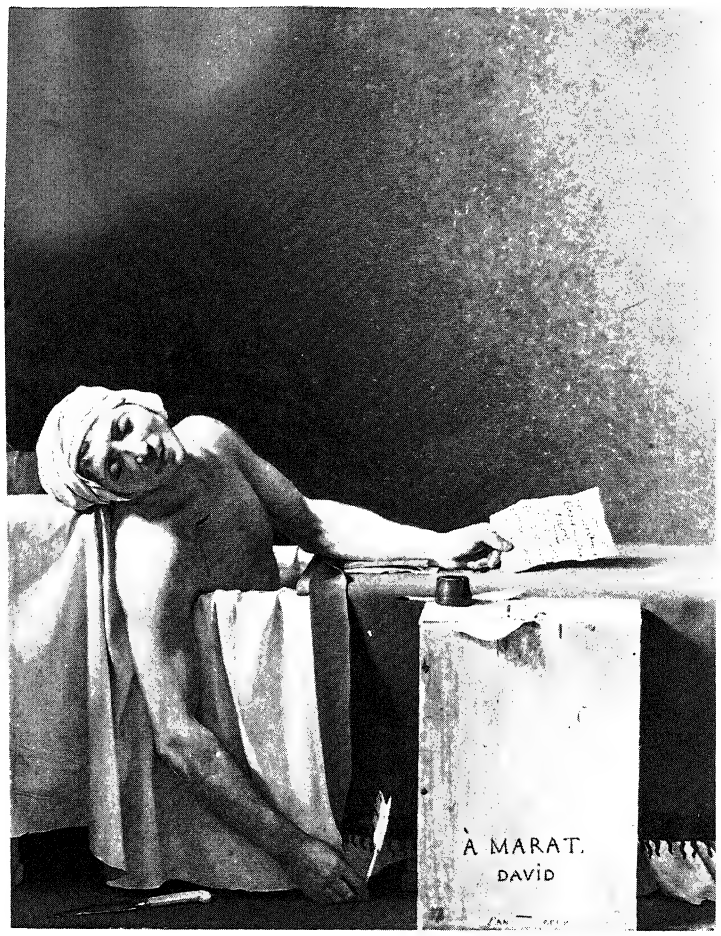
David and the Revolution

With the Revolution achieved, David found himself its spokesman and propagandist, the pictorial historian of its great events. One of the most important of these events was the Oath of the Tennis Court, when on the 28th of June, 1789, the deputies of the Third Estate swore not to disband until they had given France a constitution. Louis had refused them their usual room for assembly and they had met instead in the indoor tennis court from which the event, and David's picture of it, are named. But the picture was never finished. Before it was nearly done too many of the men represented in it had become suspect.

For a few years after the Revolution David turned his hand to any professional chore for the new government. He was the official supervisor of state ceremonies and designed celebrations on such a scale that virtually the entire population of Paris was directed to take part in them. The citizens grumbled somewhat at this; it seemed a little out of line with the new freedom. David designed playing cards eliminating the king, queen, and knave, now too suggestive of royalty. He designed a new costume for the citizens' everyday dress; it failed to catch on. He was involved with the seizure of the royal collections and others, which were declared the property of the people and have been so ever since as the core of the Louvre Museum. And he produced a painting that may be his masterpiece: *Marat* [9].

David is always a contradictory figure. No sooner is he identified in one character than he reveals himself in another. In *Marat*, painted four years after the *Brutus*, he abandons the harshness of his stoic conceptions for a compassionate nobility all the more surprising in a subject that in essence was both violent and grotesque.

Marat, a leading figure in the Reign of Terror and a close friend of David's, was assassinated in his bathtub by a woman named Charlotte Corday. Although she was a Revolutionary sympathizer, Corday was outraged by the excesses of the Terror and appointed herself judge and executioner of at least one of the guilty, Marat, and was herself guillotined for his assassination. All this occurred, and David's picture was painted, in 1793.



9. DAVID: *Marat*, 1793. 65 x 50⅝". *Musée Royal des Beaux Arts*, Brussels.

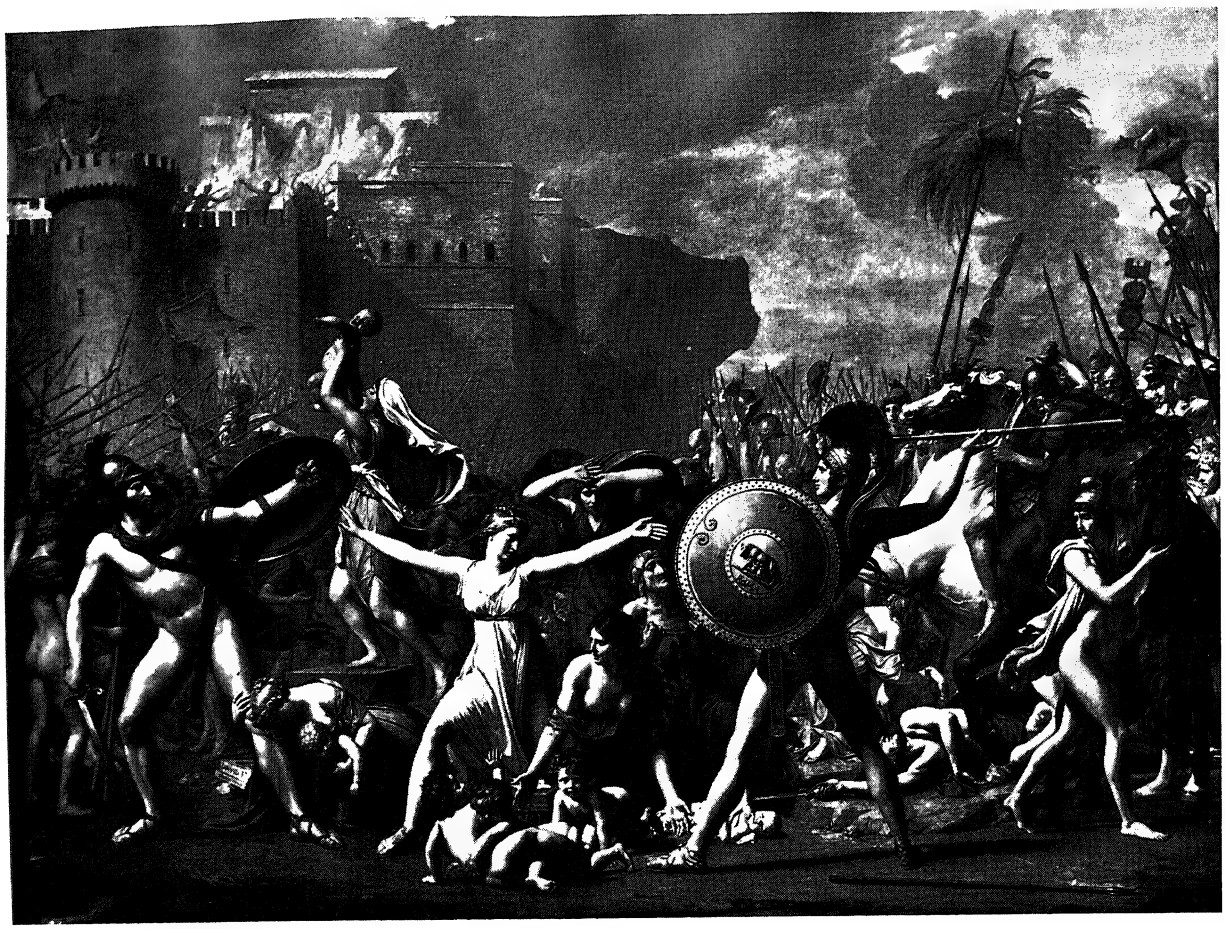
The idea of a dedicated lady in full visiting regalia attacking a naked man in his tub has inevitable associations with the ludicrous along with the terrible, even after we know that the bath was a medicinal one in which Marat spent his days because he was afflicted with an eczema. Lining the tub with sheets and wrapping his head in a turban, no doubt also medicated, he received callers and carried on business as usual—or as best he could in the circumstances. Corday gained an audience by sending a note saying she had information of vital importance to France. Marat's tub was rigged with a cover to serve as a desk;

10. BERTHAULT, engraved after SWEBACH: *Assassination of Marat,* from *Collection Complète des Tableaux Historiques de la Révolution Française,* Paris, 1802. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Adrian Siegel.

only his head and shoulders emerged above it and thus imprisoned he had no defense against Corday's dagger.

From this situation, which would seem impossibly guignolesque, David extracted a great picture. How he went about it may be revealed by a feeble treatment of the same subject [10] included in a pictorial history of the Revolution published in Paris in 1802. Here various people, attracted by the victim's cries, have rushed into the room and seized Corday (hat either knocked askew or set at a modish angle; it is impossible to tell which). But in spite of all that is supposed to be going on, no feeling of excitement is relayed to the observer. The story is not even clearly told, although presumably it is faithful to factual circumstance. Included in the general clutter of incidental figures is each detail selected by David: the tub, the cloth hanging over its side, Marat in his turban, some writing materials on a stand by the tub's side, Corday's letter requesting an audience. But where one picture remains an ill-told anecdote at best, the other, by selection, modification, and arrangement of a few meager elements, distills from the event its essence as David felt it.

Bathed in a gentle fall of light with quiet modulations of shadow, each ugly, ordinary, or utilitarian object is invested with dignity, and all are unified with one another in quiet harmony. From a particularized subject full of sordid and commonplace details, David developed a generalized statement in noble and ideal terms. Here he approaches a classicism truer than that of his classical subjects with their trappings imitated from ancient Rome.



11. David: *The Battle of the Romans and Sabines,* 1799. 152 x 204¾". Louvre, Paris.

David: The Triumph of Classicism

David's preoccupation with the ancient classical world, while not specifically mentioned, has been implied in the early series of "stoic" pictures: *The Horatii, Socrates,* and *Brutus.* Classicism in one form or another is a constant in French art, and David's art was the climax of a vogue for classical decoration that had already been stimulated by the first excavations of the buried Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. One of David's masters was Joseph Marie Vien (1716–1809), who made considerable but quite superficial use of classical motifs in his painting and who was appointed director of the Academy's school in Rome the same year David won the *Prix.* Student and master left Paris together, with David declaring that he would not be "seduced by the antique" because it lacked vivacity and life—which it certainly did in Vien's hands. But when David saw the remains of Pompeii he said it was as if "cataracts had been removed from his eyes."

Neo-classicism* usually manifested itself in superficial borrowing from the forms of ancient art, capitalizing on their grace and novelty with no concern for their corresponding philosophical ideas. But David's

* *Neo-classicism,* strictly speaking, should be used to distinguish nineteenth-century revived classicism from the genuine classicism of antiquity. But this is a nuisance, and the differentiation is usually clear in context, so *classicism* will usually be used for both in this book.

12. DAVID: Preliminary drawing for Figure 11, 1795. Louvre, Paris.

classical reference is a double one. Like the other classicists, he used classical forms parasitically, copying them outright from fragments of painting and sculpture.* But unlike the others, David wanted through these borrowed forms to revive the supposed moral virtues of ancient Rome.

Even so, David was under one misconception as to the nature of classical art which was common to his century and to a great extent remains common to this one. A German, Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768), the first archaeologist to study the monuments of antiquity with scientific method, had written a celebrated history of ancient art in which he defined beauty as synonymous with perfection. He codified the characteristics of classical art and insisted that all great art must be static because movement is an "accident." What Winckelmann did not understand was that classical art was warm, even sensuous. He confused its repose, its reserve, its calm, with a kind of frigidity, and his followers confused its idealization with prettification. A sculptor friend of David's in Rome, Quatremère de Quincy, introduced David to the theories of Winckelmann as a law permitting of no exception and no variation, and David retained all his life this limited and inaccurate concept of the classical spirit.

* In *The Oath of the Horatii* the head of the father is copied from the Roman equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, to name one example in a long list of specific borrowings.

David's archaeological neo-classicism reached its climax in *The Sabines* [11], which he completed in 1799 nearly five years after his trial and the brief imprisonment during which he made the first sketches for it. According to the legend, the Sabine women were abducted by the Romans, who took them to wife. Later when the fathers marched against the ravishers, the women threw themselves and their children between their Sabine fathers and their Roman husbands to stop the carnage. In David's picture the Sabine woman in the center is Hercelia; her husband Romulus is about to throw his javelin at Tatius, who bends to parry the blow. According to one story, David selected the subject because he was moved by the devotion of his wife, who returned to him when he was sent to prison. (She had left him when he voted for the death of the king.) According to another, Hercelia symbolizes France throwing herself between the warring parties in the civil conflict that tore the country after the Revolution. By the time David finished the picture, France had finally reached unity under Napoleon, and David is supposed to have agreed when the latter explanation was suggested, saying that was exactly what he had in mind. In that case, he had been extraordinarily prophetic in the first sketches five years earlier. A likely explanation is simply that the subject attracted him as a subject, all symbolism aside. It recalls his first success, *The Horatii*, in the conflicting loyalties of wives to their husbands at war with their families; also it must have given David pleasure to return to a purely classical subject after devoting himself for several years to pictures of the Revolution. Whatever his reasons for painting *The Sabines*, the uncanny dovetailing of his pictures with current political events, which had worked with *The Horatii* and *Brutus*, worked again. When Napoleon saw *The Sabines* in David's studio, he knew that he had found the man to direct French painting in his, Napoleon's, course toward empire.

In *The Sabines* David sought an extreme accuracy of archaeological truth. In addition, he modified the severity of his "Roman" classicism for a more "Greek" refinement. The words have to be put in quotes because the archaeology is as faulty as the idea that Roman art was as severe as the ideals of the early Republic. Actually, all such inaccuracies or misconceptions are quite beside the point, since the neo-classical style is important only as itself, not as a re-creation of the past.

The Sabines is a fascinating picture with many faults. Even its admirers admit that it is rather chilly. For all the violence of the subject, the figures are of an extreme and even disturbing rigidity. Inspired by classical sculpture, they are not so much sculpturesque as stony. The vivacity, the sense of life, that David had once found lacking in classical art is certainly lacking here. Also, the architectural background is divorced from the friezelike grouping of women and warriors; it hangs behind them like a rented backdrop. Seen at full scale (it is a large picture, seventeen feet wide), *The Sabines* tends to break into beautifully designed studies competing with one another, although individually the passages are of great attraction. The theatrical elegance of the central standing female figure and the nude warrior to the right—Hercelia and Romulus—cannot be denied, and if a single pair of figures had to be selected to represent neo-classical types at their typically most ornamental, these might well be the ones. But the words used here are *theatrical* and *elegance*, and neither is particularly associated with the high moral disciplines that can be read into David's earlier work. He has changed. In *The Sabines* these disciplines are patently specious, although the technical disciplines of concise drawing and calculated balance are exaggerated. Classicism is again decorative style, as it was in the work of David's precursors and as it continued to be in the work of his followers, though upon its technical disciplines David insisted to the end.

Academic drawing had always been based on a study of the nude; it was standard practice to make preliminary drawings from the nude even for draped figures. In a study for the figure of Tatius in *The Sabines* David begins with the skeleton, builds the muscles on it, and finally indicates the helmet sketchily [13]. From

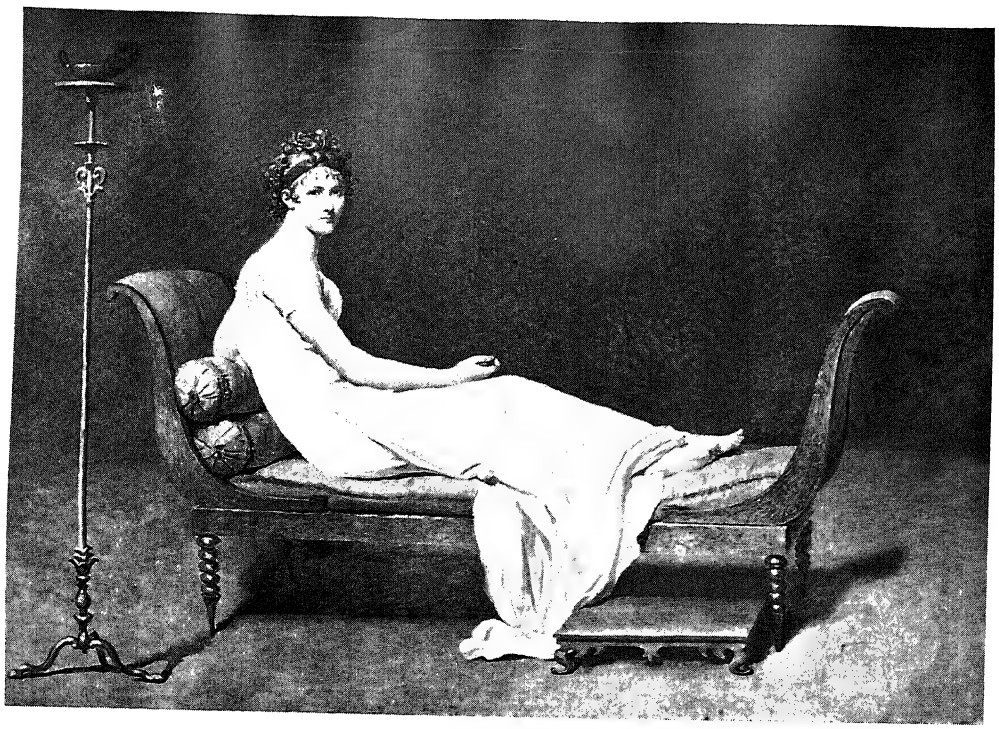
13. David: Study for Tatius in *The Sabines*. Location unknown.

studies like this one David went ahead to refine or idealize nature to one degree or another. In *The Horatii* the anatomy is realistic, but in *The Sabines* David's stated purpose was to go beyond realism to an ideal beauty. He had wanted to leave the figures of the Horatii nude, in accordance with the forms of classical sculpture, but had dared not. Compositional studies for *The Sabines* [12] show that David still felt under this restraint when he began the picture. (They also show that the rigidity of the final scheme was imposed by degrees upon a much freer one.) But by the time he was ready to complete it, modes and manners had relaxed to such an extent that he not only stripped the male figures but clothed the female ones in diaphanous garments that would have been altogether inappropriate to the severe conceptions of his early work.

David violated precedent by setting up *The Sabines* in his studio and charging admission to see it, a practice that had been forbidden by the Royal Academy. But there was no more Royal Academy and people flocked to see the picture as they had flocked to the Salons to see *The Horatii* and *Brutus*. As they paid their entrance fee, visitors were given a printed statement defending the admission charge. David made enough money to buy himself a comfortable country place outside Paris.

David and Napoleon

Now, under Napoleon, social Paris became a carnival. Freed from the moralistic restrictions of the Revolution and confident once more that the ground was not going to open beneath their feet or the guillotine descend on their necks, people with money indulged in pleasures as vain and often as licentious as the former excesses of the vanished world of the French court. David's influence on the mode reached a point without parallel in the history of the arts. A fashionable ball was a phantasmagoria of classical goddesses; a well-appointed room was as Greek or Roman as a working compromise with contemporary living would allow. The styles of decoration and costume called Directoire and Empire after the divisions of Napoleon's reign owe everything to David. The classical furniture he had designed and built for studio use was imitated in tens of thousands of pieces not only in Paris but everywhere in Europe and even in America. He now occupied himself with official paintings for Napoleon, plus whatever other commissions it interested him to accept. After the wild success of *The Sabines*, Madame Récamier, an ambitious charmer who put the highest premium on her position as a leader of social and intellectual Paris, was not too proud to write him, "I have arranged things so that I can sit for my portrait under the conditions you

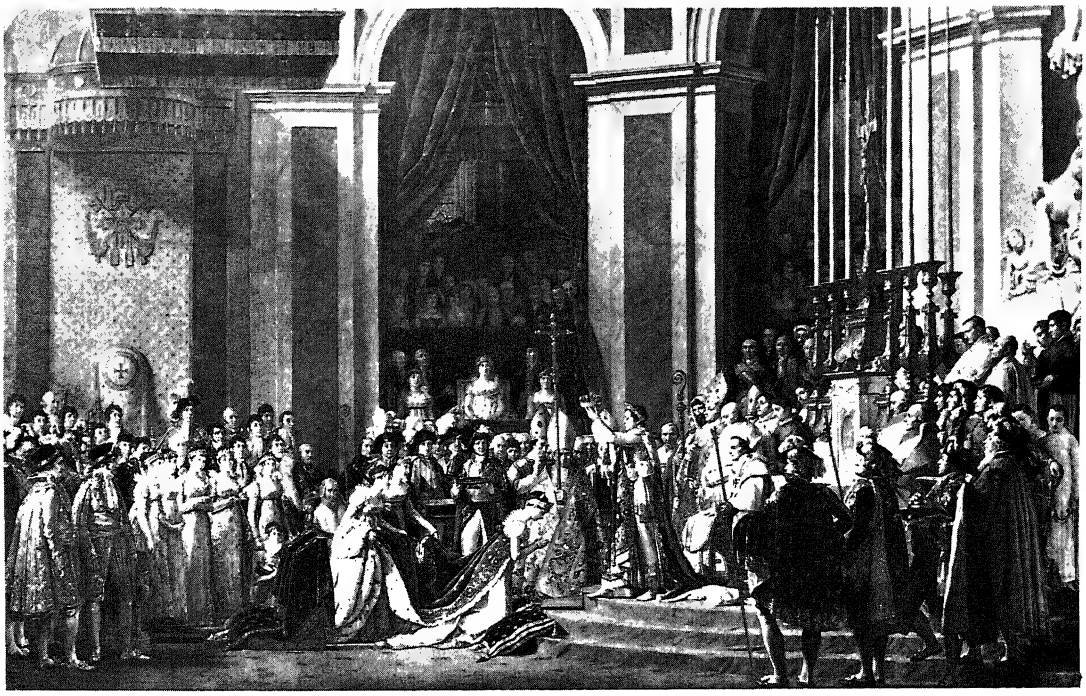


14. DAVID: *Madame Récamier,* 1800. 68 x 85¾". Louvre, Paris.

explain. I hope that you understand the great value I attach to a work by you. I will be at your orders for the sittings; let me know when it is convenient for you to begin."

The portrait [14] is one of the most delicate of David's works, an exquisite summary of the spirit of the Directoire style at its purest. It is also one of the most painterly; because it was never finished, it never received the final polish to which David reduced the surface of his other work. Madame Récamier is not posed in costume for an archaeological costume ball but is in fashionable toilette with the exception of the bare feet, a detail David insisted on although it pushed the vogue for classical imitation beyond the point acceptable even to Madame Récamier. A more serious disagreement arose when David insisted on another point: he painted the hair light brown in harmony with the color scheme of the rest of the picture and in line with the formula for classical beauty. Madame Récamier's hair was coal black and she was proud of it. Without telling David, she went to his most successful pupil, Gérard, who could be depended on to do the kind of portrait she wanted. Gérard reported to David, who told him to go ahead but refused to finish the first commission. Left thus, the portrait reveals the touch of David's brush as so deft, so sensitive, yet without any sacrifice of precision and assurance, that we realize how much was polished out of the rest of his work. With the exception of *Marat,* this is the only painting David regarded as a major one where his personal sensitivity as an artist is not impinged upon by the cruelly self-disciplined exaggerations of craftsmanship.

When Napoleon assumed the title of Emperor in 1804, David was given the title of First Painter. He had long since relinquished all political activity, and he painted now to commemorate the events of Napoleon's reign but not to comment on them beyond a general presentation of the Emperor in dignified and glorified terms. The spirit of the Napoleonic commissions is best



15. David: *Le Sacre,* 1805. 204 x 366". Louvre, Paris.

summarized in *Le Sacre* [15], a vast canvas of some 500 square feet that was to have been one of a series of four (two were completed) apotheosizing the Emperor after his coronation. *Le Sacre* is the coronation scene itself, a mass portrait of superhuman dimensions. A church was commandeered to serve as a studio—similarly, in 1792, a church had been commandeered for work on *The Oath of the Tennis Court.* This was in 1805 and David was nearly sixty; he had a corps of assistants. There was a specialist in perspective, named Degotti, for the backgrounds; a pupil, Georges Rouget, was the chief of several other lieutenant painters. Even so, David did a portrait drawing for each of the heads. The assistants transferred these to the canvas and roughed them in; David finished each one himself.

Le Sacre shows Napoleon, already crowned, in turn crowning his Empress in the presence of the Pope, a host of dignitaries, and the distressingly unimpressive members of the family. Napoleon preferred to be represented at this moment rather than the one in which he knelt to be crowned by the Pope, since thus he was not put on record at any man's feet. It has been objected that the attendant figures of the court have the air of parvenus in their Sunday best. That, of course, is exactly what they were.

For this as for the other pictures David painted of him Napoleon refused to pose. "Why do you need a model?" he asked. "Do you think the great men of antiquity posed for their portraits? Who cares whether the busts of Alexander the Great look like him? It is enough that we have an image of him that conforms to his genius. That is the way great men should be painted." In *Le Sacre* the great man is painted as a handsome, almost boyish fellow, and he places the crown upon the head of an outrageously rejuvenated Josephine, for whose figure one of David's daughters posed. When an acquaintance objected to this flattering transformation of a woman who was a badly preserved forty-one, and six years older than her husband, David

16. DAVID: *Madame Sériziat,* 1795. Panel, 51½ x 37¾". Louvre, Paris.

17. DAVID: *Monsieur Sériziat,* 1795. Panel, 50¾ x 37¾". Louvre, Paris.

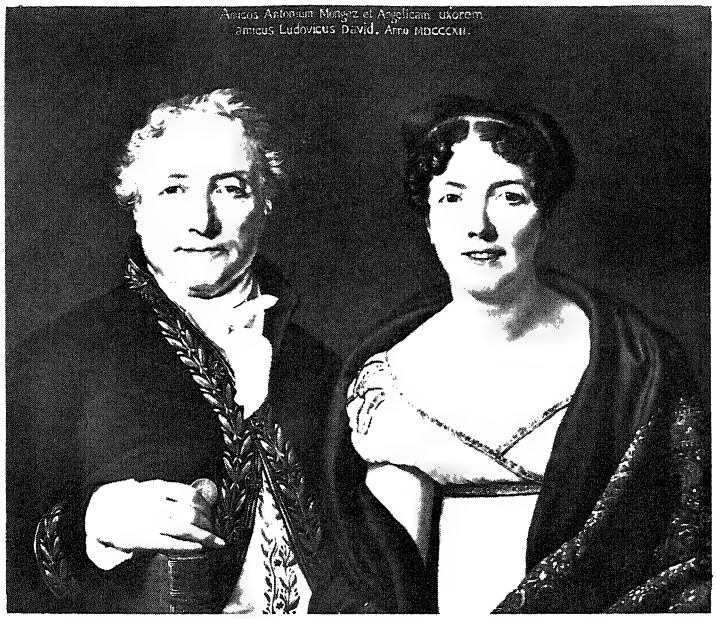
quashed the objection by suggesting that it be made directly to the Empress herself.

In *Le Sacre* David had a next-to-impossible assignment. It was not only that the picture had to be so large. Mythological or ancient historical references were ruled out by Napoleon's demand for a straightforward record of the event, and without them David was forced into a rather pedestrian realism, saved from dullness only by the magnificence of the staging of the actual ceremony. On the whole, *Le Sacre* is a ponderous and wearisome picture in spite of everything David could do. But it is probably the most familiar of all pictures to French school children and remains for Frenchmen the symbol of the glorious days of Napoleon's zenith.

Given the initial handicaps, David's solution was more than adequate. He solved the problem of organizing so many figures partly by grouping, but even more by a less apparent device, a consistent illumination that binds each participant into convincing relationship to the others. There is nothing subtle about this light; it unifies the picture only because it falls so logically everywhere. As a help, David studied a scaled mock-up of the scene, built for him complete with costumed miniature figures. Yet in the end *Le Sacre* is not a stirring picture except by association of ideas. In it David is the soundest of craftsmen, but he is not an artist of emotional or intellectual force.

David: The Artist

What about David as an artist of personal sensitivity, an artist who can respond to human joy and sorrow, gaiety and confusion, hope and disappointment, revery and



18. DAVID: *Antoine Mongez and His Wife Angelica,* 1812. Panel, 37¾ x 54". *Musée de Lille.*

excitement, and communicate with us as other human beings?

In this respect David often denies himself, on the stoic principle that the expression of emotions of either pleasure or pain is a weakness. Even in a picture of the stature of *The Oath of the Horatii,* the observer is likely to feel that he is not so much sharing an experience or an idea as being taught a lesson—which happens to be exactly what the encyclopedist Diderot, just before the Revolution, stated as the function of painting.

But in his portraits David frequently relents, especially when the sitters are close friends and the pictures were not intended for formal public exhibition. After his release from prison he stayed for a while with his wife's sister, Émélie Sériziat, and her husband. David was a man who had been bitterly chastised, who had narrowly escaped execution, whose career seemed to be in ruins. He had always been a man with a reputation for severity, yet during his imprisonment his friends and his family had shown him loyalty and affection. During the two months he spent with the Sériziats he must have been conscious of his good fortune, grateful for the kindness of people, perhaps even aware of and regretful for his own iciness. There was a particularly affectionate bond between David and Émélie; the portrait he now painted of her [16] is a delight and a revelation of gentle sensitivities rarely suggested in his work up until this time. The informality of the pose, the freshness of the color, the loving attention to engaging details of costume and the sweetness of the little bouquet of flowers—all these are specific attractions but they only partially account for something more elusive, a tenderness and human warmth, an intimacy of personal response between painter and subject.

The air of intimacy and informality is not accidental, for the picture is carefully composed. The placement of the child is masterly. In a more conspicuous position he would have detracted from the picture as David conceived it, since this is a portrait of Émélie Sériziat, not a picture of a mother and child. As it is, the child is very nearly crowded out of the picture, which would have been unpleasant if David had not turned the head so that we are regarded with open curiosity. The child seems almost to have slipped into the range of the picture by accident, without knowledge that he would be painted; he is held in perfect balance, neither detracting from the main subject nor altogether subjugated to it. The companion portrait of Monsieur Sériziat [17] is closer to Davidian formula, but not close enough for its precision to turn frigid.

The Sériziats were painted in 1795. Seventeen years later David painted a double portrait of his friend Antoine Mongez and his wife [18]. Like the Sériziat portraits, this one was a labor of love. It is inscribed "Amicos Antonium Mongez et Angelicam uxorem amicus Ludovicus David. Anno MDCCCXII."

The Latin is not an affectation but appropriate in a portrait of Mongez, the author of a scholarly dictionary of antiquities. His hand rests on this volume and also holds a coin, symbol of his function as an administrator in the government's department of finance. His wife Angelica had been a student of David's; she costumed the figures for his mock-up of *Le Sacre* and

executed minor passages in that gigantic picture. The Mongez portrait is more formal than those of the Sériziats but no less warm, and as a presentation of two rich personalities it even surpasses them. It is as if we met the young Sériziats after a passage of years and a happy transition into middle age.

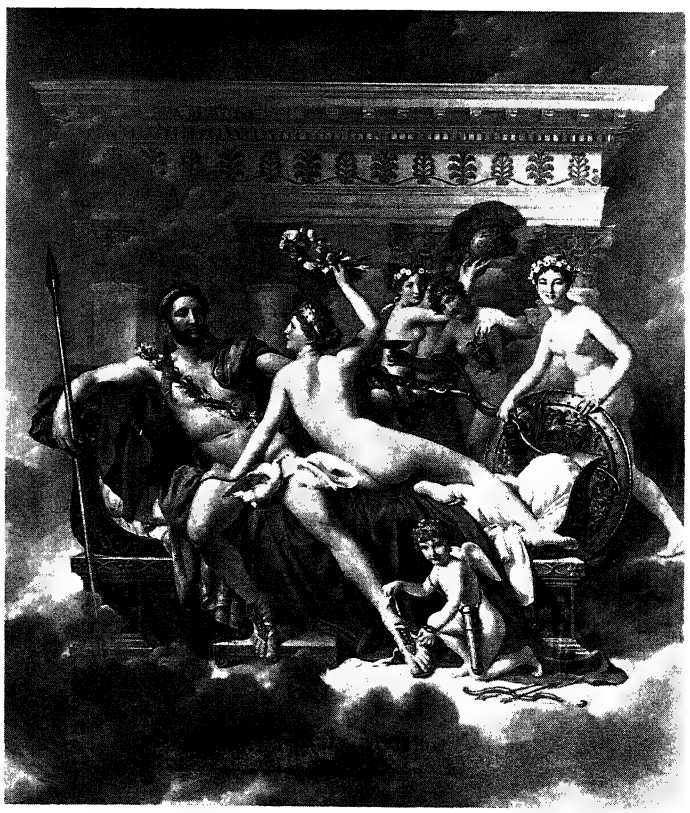
When Napoleon fell, David was exiled. He finished his life in Brussels, painting away at whatever assignments it pleased him to set himself, venerated by followers of the tradition he had established, the grand old man of French painting. In his youth, still competing for the *Prix de Rome,* he had painted a picture of *Mars Vanquished by Minerva* [19]—the forces of violence and confusion conquered by the intellect. It is a windy picture, full of the artificialities and mannerisms of eighteenth-century painting that David later annihilated with his classical style. His last work, completed in exile fifty-three years later, in 1824, the year before his death, is another version of the defeat of Mars [20]. In the early picture Venus floats near by in support of Minerva, but in the later one she replaces her. In *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces* violence and confusion are conquered not by the intellect but by the heart. Cupid unbinds the sandals of the god of war, who relinquishes his sword and shield to the Graces. Venus places a wreath of blossoms on his head; a pair of doves bill and coo on his muscular thigh. The picture is a little cloying, a little overgraceful. It may be an old man's revery, but if it is, it may be also his apology for the fanatic severity of his earlier convictions.

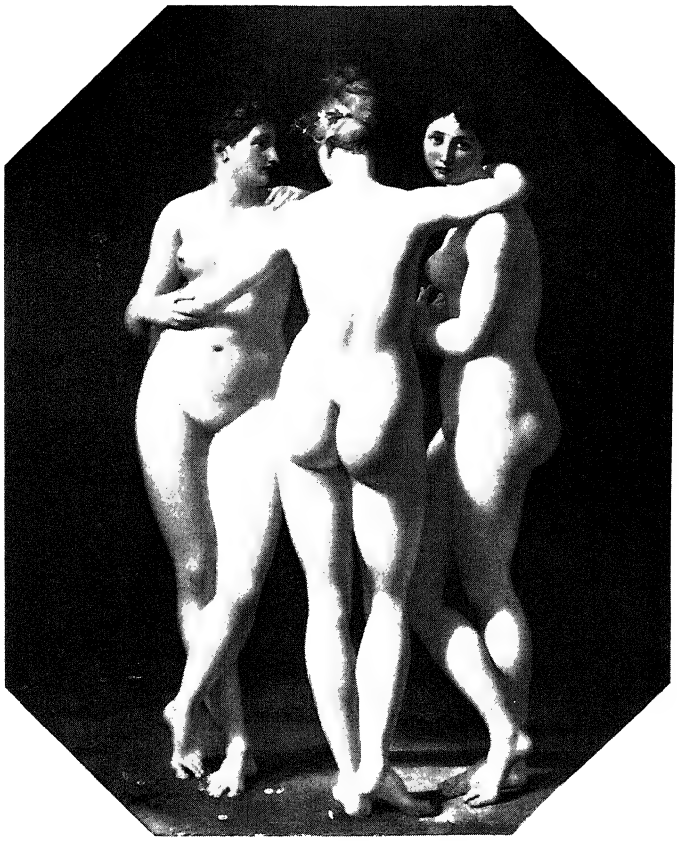
Sculptors and Other Painters

Neo-classical sculpture has little place in a story of modern art, for sculpture found no David and followed a speciously classical formula of prettiness and high polish which, as we will see in a moment, also infected the second generation of neo-classical painters. For the record, however, the names of the Italian sculptor Antonio Canova (1757–1822), the Frenchman Antoine Denis Chaudet (1763–1810), and the pedantic

19. DAVID: *Mars Vanquished by Minerva,* 1771. 45 x 55". Louvre, Paris.

20. DAVID: *Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces,* 1824. 118 x 103". *Musée Royal des Beaux Arts,* Brussels.





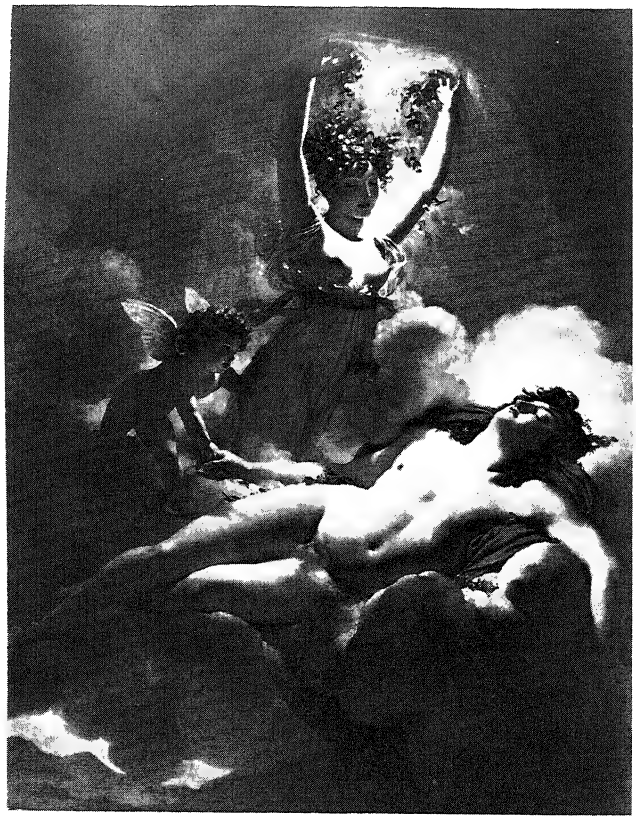
21. CHINARD: *Madame Récamier,* 1802–05. Marble, life size. *Musée des Beaux Arts,* Lyon.

22. J. B. REGNAULT: *Three Graces,* Salon of 1799. 78¾ x 60¼", octagonal. Louvre, Paris.

Dane, Bertel Thorwaldsen (1770–1844), must be mentioned. Some of the most rewarding bits of neo-classical sculpture are found spotted among the works of more obscure men. An example [21] is a bust of Madame Récamier (who never tired of commissioning images of herself) by Joseph Chinard (1756–1813), where sensitive realism brings unusual life to classically derived forms of the kind that were worked to death in the majority of cases.

Among painters, David's contemporary rival was a man seldom thought of today, Jean-Baptiste Regnault (1745–1829), who won the *Prix de Rome* in 1776 two years after David. Unlike David, who was suspicious of antiquity before the "cataracts were removed from his eyes," Regnault was dedicated to classicism from the beginning, but only in its superficial aspect as a storehouse of graceful forms. He remained a painter of the eighteenth-century court with all its caprice, seductive posturings, and artifice. In his *Three Graces* [22], as a single example, he borrows an arrangement directly from a popular and often-repeated piece of classical sculpture, but the luscious girls he paints are classical in pose only; otherwise they remain the little courtesans and coquettes popularized by the eighteenth-century court painter Boucher.

As early as 1808 David was saying, "The direction I have set for the fine arts is too severe to please for very long in France." This was true, and had already become apparent before David became aware of it. We have just seen that even in his own work he did not maintain the severity of his earliest successes. The second generation of classicists paid brush-service to the



23. GÉRARD: *Psyche Receiving the First Kiss from Cupid,* 1798. 42½ x 52". Louvre, Paris.

24. GUÉRIN: *Aurora and Cephalus,* 1810. 99¼ x 72". Louvre, Paris.

master, imitating his technical polish without understanding the philosophical intention behind it. Their spirit is closer to Regnault's. This was true even of David's favorite pupil, François Gérard (1770–1837). At sixteen Gérard was studying in David's studio, and David remained his sponsor from then on. For a while he gave up painting when David succeeded in getting him named a member of the Revolutionary Tribunal; it is difficult to think of Gérard in this capacity after acquaintance with his sugary *Psyche Receiving the First Kiss from Cupid* [23] or for that matter any of his other pictures. It is customary to deny virtues of any kind to Gérard, as if his art were entirely detestable, and it is true that in comparison with David's strength Gérard's affectations are appalling. But if the standard of judgment is lowered to that of the fashionable exercise, which is Gérard's proper level, he doesn't come off too badly. Some of his portraits are charming.

Gérard's reputation during his own time was so inflated that critics ever since seem to have been trying to cut him down to size. He had a series of brilliant Salon successes, of which *Psyche Receiving the First Kiss from Cupid* was the climax. He painted Napoleon's family and leading dignitaries. After Napoleon fell and David was exiled, Gérard continued his dazzling career. The statesman Talleyrand presented him to Louis XVIII, the restored Bourbon, and he became the favorite painter of the court and the world surrounding it. In 1819 he was created a baron. His father, a Frenchman, and his mother, an Italian, had been servants before the Revolution.

25. GUÉRIN: *Phaedra and Hippolytus*, 1802. 101¼ x 139¾". Louvre, Paris.

Whatever his shortcomings as a philosophical moralist or an intellectual classicist, Gérard is a tower of strength in comparison with his immediate contemporary Pierre-Narcisse Guérin (1774–1833), a pupil not of David's but of Regnault's. Another *Prix de Rome* winner, Guérin made an exaggerated success in the Salon of 1799. The Royalist party interpreted his picture of *Marcus Sextus Returned from Exile* as a symbol of the return to France of the emigrés who had left during the Revolution, a stroke of luck. Among biographies of successful men, Guérin's is refreshing, because he was a lazy student who had not been interested in becoming a painter in the first place. Whether he ever became much of one is open to question, but everything fell into his lap, including finally the directorship of the Academy's school in Rome. Two of his paintings, *Aurora and Cephalus* [24] imitating Regnault's sensuous prettiness and *Phaedra and Hippolytus* [25] imitating David's spareness and precision, show how well he learned to go through the classical motions and how little connection he had with the classical spirit in either direction. *Aurora and Cephalus* is incredible in its candified suggestiveness; *Phaedra and Hippolytus* is not so much a painting as it is a scene from a drama performed by some of the most incompetent actors ever to have become involved in a classical tragedy. Yet from Guérin's studio came two of the most important painters of the century, Géricault and Delacroix, with whom the next chapter of this book is concerned, as well as many competent painters of less importance who are secure enough in their small niches.

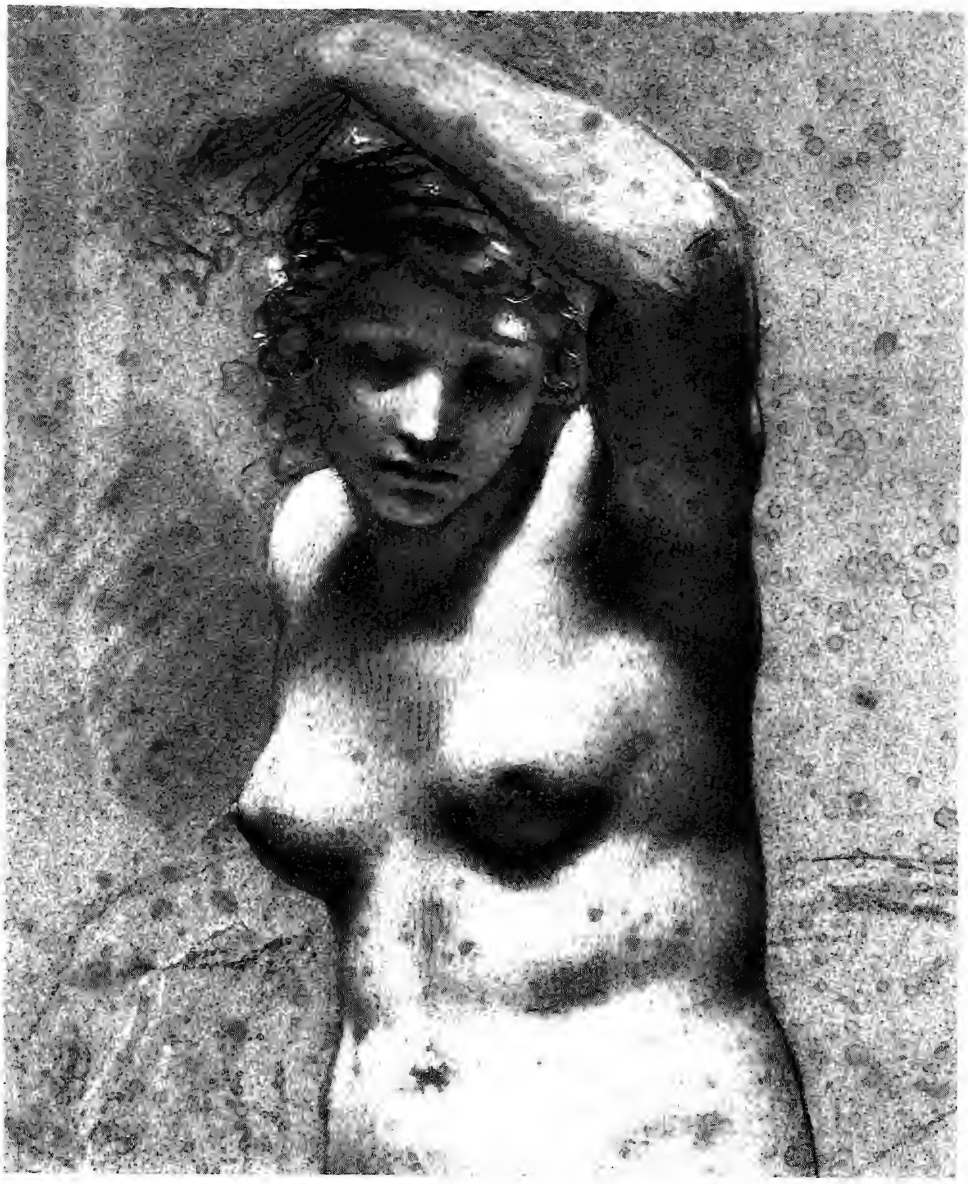
Two other students of David's must be mentioned parenthetically: Étienne-Jean Delécluze (1781–1863), because his name frequently appears as the defender of classicism when it came under attack—he stopped painting early, after a good start, to devote himself to writing—and Jean August Dominique Ingres, because he is

26. PRUD'HON: *Justice and Divine Vengeance Pursuing Crime,* 1808. 95¾ x 115". Louvre.

one of the greatest of all French painters. Ingres quarreled with David after a close early association; he will be given a chapter in this book later on.

Finally, one man, Pierre Paul Prud'hon (1758–1823), in nineteenth-century classicism is that anomaly which turns up in every school: the painter of talent and originality who was accepted by the school yet seems to bear no relationship to it. While the other classicists were sharpening their lines to razor-edge precision and polishing their forms to tinny brilliance, Prud'hon developed a style based on soft, yielding volumes emerging from and melting into smoky shadows, a style derived from Leonardo da Vinci and, even more, from Correggio, although these late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italians were not much in classical favor. Prud'hon was an enthusiastic user of the new bitumen pigments, which gave wonderful velvety depths to shadows. As it turned out, these pigments blistered, cracked, darkened, and peeled with age, so most of Prud'hon's canvases are in ruinous condition. His best-known painting, *Justice and Divine Vengeance Pursuing Crime* [26], is a ghost of itself, but still suggests the moody poetry, a little forced sometimes, that marked Prud'hon at his best. Slightly younger than David, but within his generation, Prud'hon was befriended by David during a difficult, unsavory, and emotionally disturbed life.

Prud'hon's drawings are often more satisfying than his paintings. As an example, a nude study in black and white chalk on gray-blue paper [27] combines sound formal description with the effect of soft, spreading illumination he cultivated. Perhaps his paintings had more of this quality before they deteriorated; or perhaps the drawing is more successful than the paintings ever were simply because Prud'hon's talent was not strong enough to encompass more ambitious conceptions.



27. PRUD'HON: *Nude,* date unknown. 15 x 13". Collection Henry P. McIlhenny, Philadelphia.

The Break with Classicism

To call these men minor classicists reduces the list of major ones to a single name, David, always excepting Ingres, who was disinherited. And whatever their differences, all these men share one similarity that cuts them off from David: they all hint at connections with lyricism or personal emotionalism. This spirit was in the air. More than David's disciplined classicism, it was the spirit of the new century. It was romanticism. It was a force too strong to be held in check by the classically minded Academy, and it breaks through openly in the painting of two nominally classical artists, Girodet and Gros, whom it is now time to consider.

CHAPTER 2

Romanticism

The Romantic Spirit

David declared that "Art should have no other guide than the torch of Reason," but this dictum is opposed by a sentiment held dear by the French: "The heart has its reasons which Reason does not know." The romantic movement was a revolt of the heart against Reason, of emotion against intellect, of the mysterious against the rational, of the individual against formula—in short, of the senses and the imagination against everything else.

No art of much consequence is created without some fusion of emotional and intellectual values, and this truth the romantic artists did not deny. But they trusted their hearts before their heads, put their intellect at the service of their instincts. If a conflict between emotional and intellectual values forced them to a choice, they dropped the torch of Reason to follow their unreasonable impulse, even when they were not certain where it might lead them. They would abandon moderation for excess, when necessary, accept confusion rather than run the risk of sacrificing spontaneity to lucidity, were willing to be utterly illogical if within their hearts they felt that they might stifle emotional truth by subjecting it to analysis. The classicists had spoken rationally of "Beauty, sublime and severe, which can be defined only by theory and understood only by Reason."* But the romantics worshiped a beauty sublime and passionate, which could not be defined and could be appreciated only by the heart.

* Quatremère de Quincy.

For all these reasons, romanticism out of control was often turgid, bizarre, formless, hysterical—just as classicism misunderstood had grown sterile, repetitious, and frigid. Classicists and romantics accused one another of these faults in the conflict that put them at one another's throats shortly after David's death, in a struggle that took surface form as a romantic rebellion against the platitude and monotony and hampering restrictions of the classical dogma as observed by the second-rate painters in control of the Academy. But romanticism went deeper than professional antagonisms and theories of art. It was a way of life, a way of life demanding spiritual nourishment of a special kind that classicism did not offer.

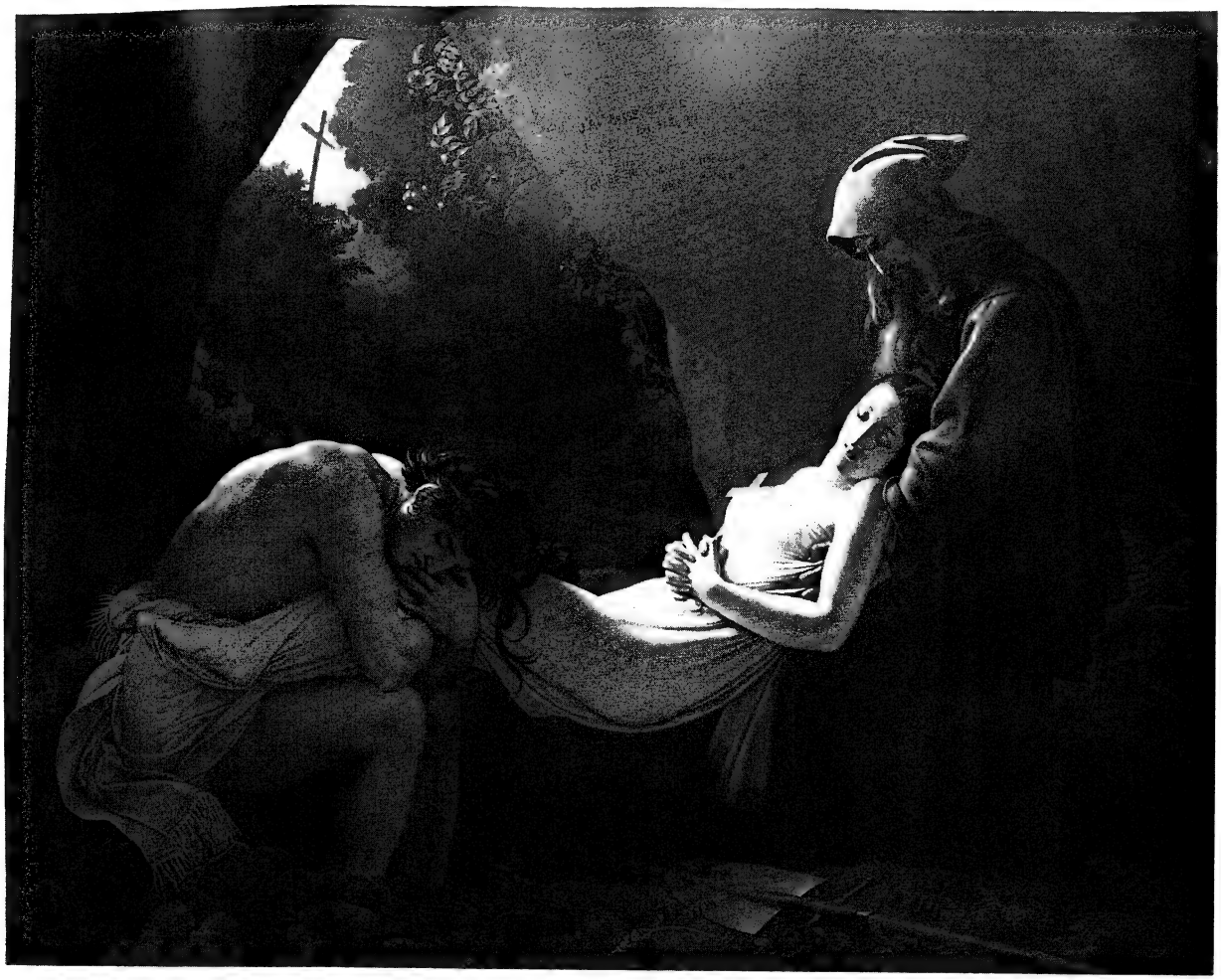
Classicism assumes the existence of a perfect order, hidden but discoverable beneath the chaos of human experience. But the assumption is not often justified by the world around us, and certainly was not justified by the succession of events in France for several decades after 1789—the tumult of the Revolution, the hysteria of the Terror, the bloody grandeur of Napoleon's triumphs, the shattering disillusion after his fall, and all the subsequent corruption and dissension. Yet classical artists continued to put a premium on balance, precision, and rule in a world that was lopsided, confused, and unpredictable. The romantics would have none of their outworn formulas.

David's art had been an expression of eighteenth century philosophy that deified Reason, but the century had also produced a philosopher who gave the romantics a different point of departure. He was Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who preached a return to nature, the essential goodness of man, the rights of the individual. It is only a step from Rousseau's idea that man is naturally noble to the idea that his untrammeled emotions, his instincts "in the raw," are merely sterilized, not refined, by the classical process of intellectualizing. The romantics took this step. The classical artists and philosophers had stood aside from mankind's experience to see it in breadth and to create a man-made harmony from its confusions. The romantics refused to stand aside; they plunged into the midst of experience to savor its contradictions, and when the world was too much for them, when their battered souls demanded surcease, they found it not in the contemplation of synthetic order but in imagined worlds of curious and exotic invention. Like the classicists, the romantics haunted Rome, but for different reasons. To the romantic eye, the ruins of the ancient world were not reminders of Reason. They were reminders of man's mortality. Choked by vines and grasses among the crumbling stones, the broken monuments of antiquity evoked lost battles, dead loves, and mysteries. They were settings for melancholy revery, for trysts, for episodes of sweetness or of violence. For the romantic, even the classical world was fodder for emotional yearnings.

Romantic Classicism: "Atala"

In painting, the romantic spirit appeared first in classical disguise. It is hinted at in the sugar-syrup sentiment of some of David's followers, as we have already seen, and is strong in the work of Anne-Louis Girodet-Trioson (1767–1824). Girodet was a student of David's as well as a *Prix de Rome* winner (in 1789, with Gérard second). He was busy with *The Entombment of Atala* [28] while David was putting the finishing touches on *Le Sacre*. Technically *The Entombment of Atala* is a fine classical showpiece. But conceptually it belongs to the opposing camp.

This camp had hardly begun to gather its forces. The first indications of what was about to happen were literary ones, and *The Entombment of Atala* was the result of one of them. In 1801 a young aristocrat, adventurer, and romantic spirit named René de Chateaubriand published a brief novel, *Atala*, a curious compound of the fantastic, the irrational, the beautiful, and the absurd, except that in romantic conception nothing is absurd simply because it appeals to the heart at the expense of all logic. *Atala* was a great success; it was sensational on several scores. The scene was laid in the mysterious and fascinating American wilderness; the characters were



28. GIRODET: *The Entombment of Atala,* 1808. 82¾ x 105". Louvre, Paris.

American Indians (Atala, the heroine, was a half-breed girl); and the plot had a strong, if artificial, flavoring of religious sentiment. (Christianity had become fashionable with Napoleon's re-establishment of the Church after the Revolution.)

Girodet's picture was painted seven years after the appearance of the novel and illustrates its final episode. The maiden Atala has died rather than yield her virginity in marriage to her lover, in observance of a vow made not by Atala but by her mother many years before. (This is only a minor complexity in a plot that would sound ludicrous in summary.) The other characters in the picture are her lover Choctas and a priest attached to a never-never mission in the Florida jungles. The several romantic elements here had better be examined one at a time:

First, the story of Atala is romantic because it is preoccupied with personal emotionalism. The problems faced by the Horatii, by Socrates, by Brutus, and by the Sabines may have involved personal distress, but this was incidental to the importance of a general social moral ideal. The reverse is true in Atala's case. Although she has sacrificed herself, it is not for the State or a political theory. Her difficulties were entirely personal and hence puny by Davidian standards.

29. GIRODET: *Ossian Receiving the Generals of Napoleon,* 1802. 75½ x 71½". Malmaison.

30. GIRODET: Preliminary study for Figure 29. 13 x 11¼". Louvre.

Second, the picture violates the ideal of reserve nominally demanded by classicism. Everything in it seeks to stir the observer's emotions—the exaggerated light dramatizing a moody setting, the pathetic beauty of the dead girl, the anguish of her lover.

The Christian element, being nonrational, is unclassical; and finally, the Atala story is romantic in its exoticism. A yearning for the far away and the long ago, for the high colors and fantastic peoples and curiosities of the Orient or the wilderness or of any place offering escape into the vivid and the mysterious—this yearning was a trait of the romantics in their search for release, stimulation, and fulfillment.

These romantic heresies announce themselves rather hesitantly in Girodet's picture, however, and are all but concealed beneath its classical veneer. Atala might be a beautiful Greek maiden, and her gauzy robe is inexplicable in any but classical terms. The nudity of her mourning lover is the idealized nudity of classical sculpture, not the rough nudity of a savage; Choctas might be a gladiator. And technically the painting is tight and smooth enough to satisfy any classical pedant. The dramatic light and shade is something of a departure from standard procedure, but otherwise Girodet hints at none of the technical innovations that in full-blown romantic painting were to shock the Academy more than the romantic spirit did.

The traditional recognition of *The Entombment of Atala* as a tentative romantic expression has obscured the importance of an earlier painting by Girodet, an extremely curious hybrid which, with a slightly different history, might have become the manifesto of romantic painting. *Ossian Receiving the Generals of Napoleon* [29] is a fantastic and complicated allegory celebrating the Continental Peace of 1801; it shows the ghosts of Napoleon's generals being received into a light-shot otherworld by the ghost of Ossian, a Gaelic bard of the third century. This extraordinary juxtaposition of characters is an offshoot of an audacious literary forgery. In 1760–1763 the Scotch writer James Macpherson published some grandiose and somber poems of his own invention, presenting them as transla-

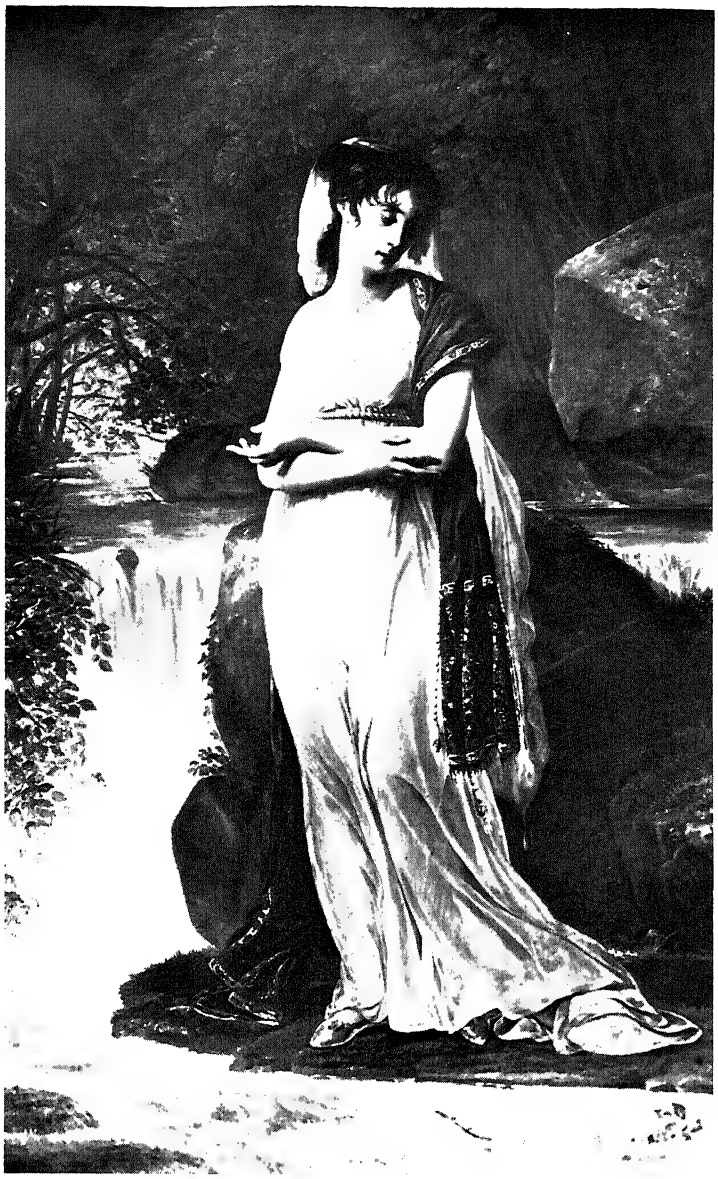
tions of Ossian. The poems were received with enthusiasm, and Ossianism reached the proportions of a cult in France, an early indication that the romantic yearning for the exotic and the grandiloquent was already stirring. Girodet's Napoleonic allegory forced current events into parallel with Macpherson's forged Gaelic legends—an obvious violation of classical doctrine, which demanded parallels with ancient Rome or Greece. The picture further violates every classical regulation in its swirling, visionary composition, especially as Girodet first conceived it in a preliminary study [30]. In the final version he compromised to some extent, polishing his romantic fantasy into superficial accord with classical disciplines as far as the individual forms are concerned. Yet even this compromise is interesting as a final contradiction, between reason and fantasy, in a conception paradoxical from the beginning. Fantastical invention seems to have been natural to Girodet's talent, but *Ossian Receiving the Generals of Napoleon* was badly received at the Salon, and Girodet never attempted anything like it again. What could have been a romantic manifesto ended as the most curiously isolated and artificial concoction of the neo-classical school.

Napoleonic Romanticism: Gros

In its precision and balance, *The Entombment of Atala* implies that life is harmonious and orderly even when mildly compromised with sentiment. True romanticism could not allow such a compromise, and Napoleonic France produced a generation unwilling to accept it, a generation accustomed to violence, thirsty for strong experiences, goaded by an acute awareness of the transience of life. Anguish this generation could understand, and exaltation and despair, but not serenity nor repose. To the young officers back from the Napoleonic battlefields, the classical tragedies in the Parisian theaters and the classical paintings in the Salons seemed, somehow, not so stirring as they had remembered.

31. Gros: *Colonel Fournier-Sarlovèze,* 1812. 96¾ x 68". Louvre.

Much more than in the tepid, graceful *Entombment of Atala,* the new ferment is at work in the painting of Antoine Jean Gros (1771–1835), a member of Napoleon's staff and a pupil of David's, by temperament a romantic of an extreme type—melancholy; brooding; impressed with the prescience of death, the suffering of man in the world, and the tragedy that not even greatness (as exemplified for Gros in Napoleon, whom he idolized) is immune to error, confusion, and malevolence. Romantic sensibility could find exaltation in suffering; melancholy was often cultivated as a pose; the voluptuousness of spiritual torment became one of the romantic pleas-



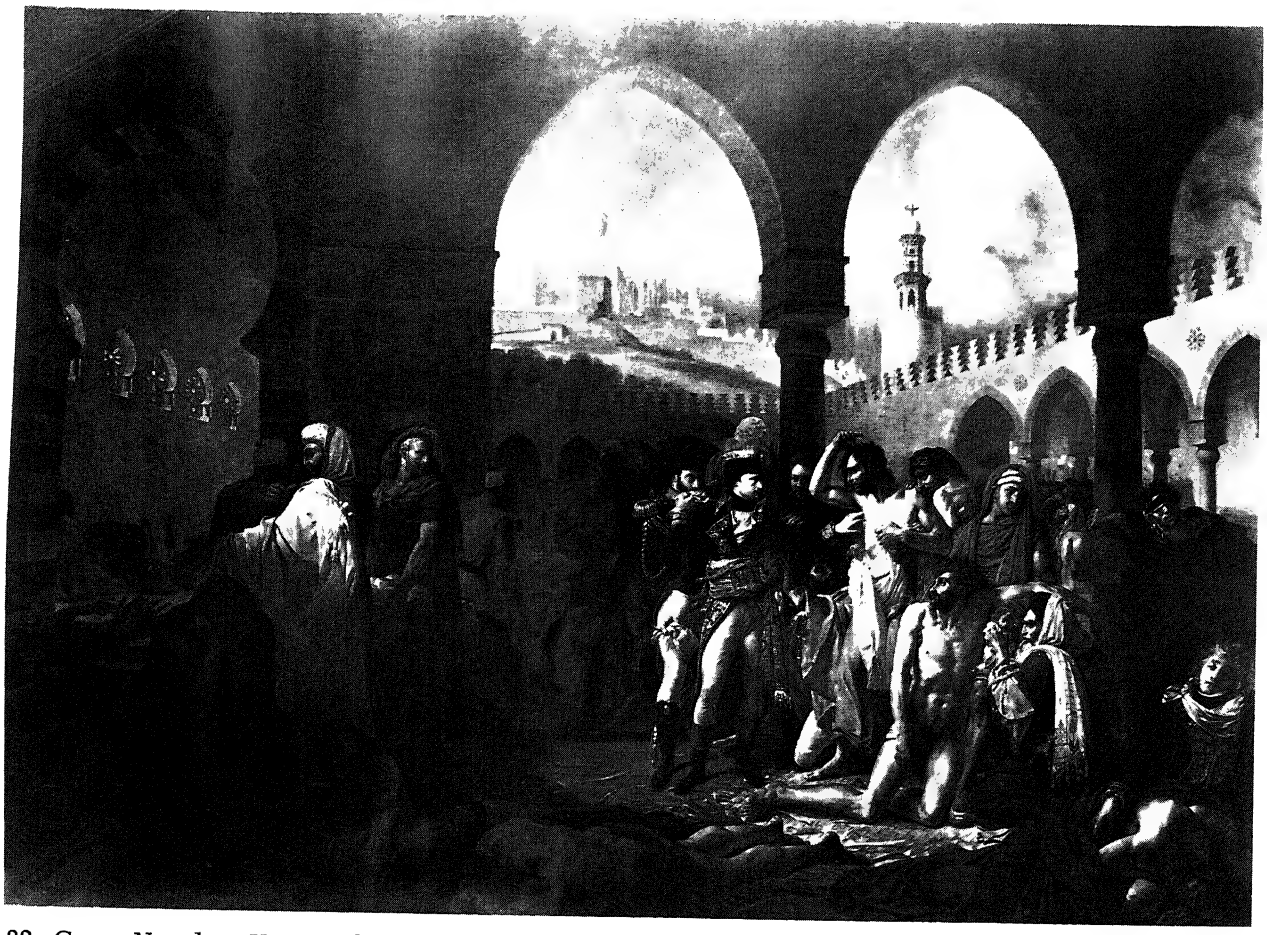
32. Gros: *Christine Boyer*, *c.* 1800. 84¼ x 52". Louvre, Paris.

ures, especially when this torment could be displayed in attitudes becoming to the tormented.

But the suffering could be real, and with Gros it was. Five years after the date generally accepted as the victory year of romanticism, 1830 (when Victor Hugo's romantic drama, *Hernani*, was tempestuously presented in declared opposition to the standards of the classical theater), Gros committed suicide in three feet of water, at the age of sixty-four. It may seem absurd to suggest that his inability to reconcile the classical ideal he yearned to believe in with the romantic one he could not help believing in was a contributing factor to his suicide. But it seems absurd only because it is difficult to imagine today the furore of the romantic–classic conflict at a time when the arts were so much a part of national life. In a France still trying to come to balance after the Revolution and the Napoleonic disaster, the exhibition of a picture or the publication of a work of fiction or the staging of a play could become a national issue.

In Italy, where his Napoleonic service took him, Gros saw works of Michelangelo, Rubens, and Van Dyck. The first two especially were the antithesis of the neo-classical ideal in their swirling movement, emotional intensity, twisting forms and, in the case of Rubens, the opulent color applied with dash and freedom. These were the men with whom the repressed romantic Gros had a natural temperamental affinity, and in spite of everything he could do to maintain his allegiance to the dogmas of classicism, their influence kept breaking through. Gros was a fine painter with a superb feeling for dramatic composition, a painterly painter with a natural painter's love for the manipulation of pigment, which he sought to repress in accord with David's dictum, "pas d'emportement du pinceau." But his brush very nearly carried him away—by Davidian standards—in some passages of his portrait of *Colonel Fournier-Sarlovèze* [31]. The romantic pose—hand on hip; head thrown back while he scans the distance; sword drawn from scabbard as he stands debonair, dashing, confident, handsome, and elegant against the dramatic background—cries aloud for equally dramatic brushwork. In the lining of the cape, the crumpled papers tossed on the ground, and especially the ornamentation of gold braid and tassels, Gros yields to temptation; the paint is thick and rich and freely applied in character with the subject's romantic flair.

The portrait of *Christine Boyer* [32] is an even greater departure from classicism, because its romantic mood is more arbi-

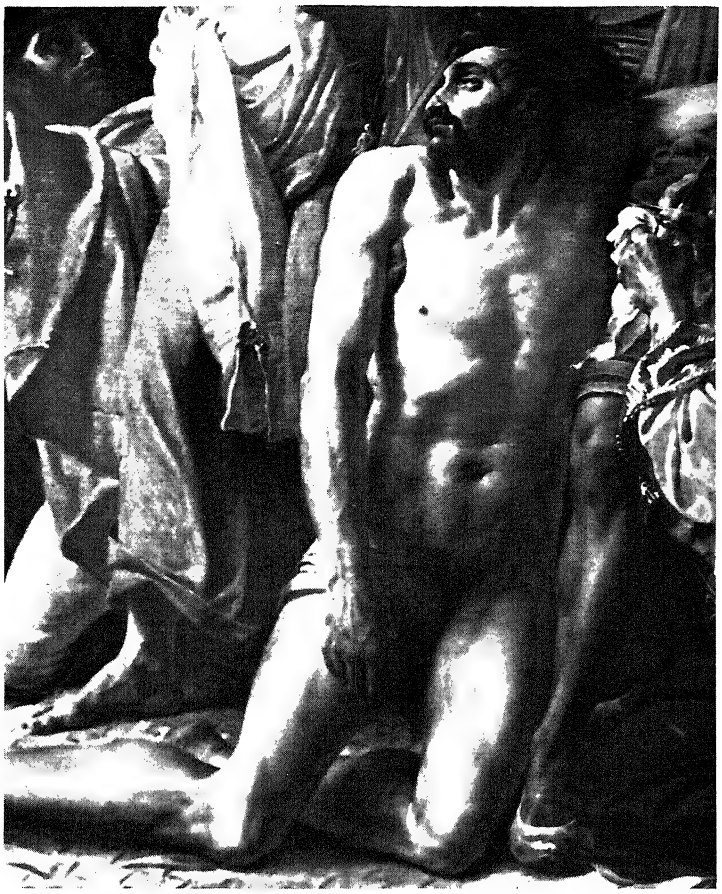


33. GROS: *Napoleon Visiting the Pesthouse at Jaffa,* 1804. 209 x 283". Louvre, Paris. Detail on opposite page.

trarily selected and the means of creating it are more artificial. To paint a general's portrait reflecting the color and excitement of battle is only to capitalize upon circumstantial material. But the *Christine Boyer* is deliberately romanticized. A lovely woman in elegant indoor attire is moodily and inexplicably posed by the side of a stream in a shady woods. Her crimson shawl falls on a mossy rock; a waterfall behind her tumbles into a rocky bed; the stream flows toward us through the darkening woods from a little cave of light in the distance. The trees are dense and dark along the banks and behind the beautiful quiet face. This face is turned slightly away from us to gaze upon a single rose floating on the current (at the extreme lower right corner of the picture), which in a moment will be carried beyond our vision, and beyond hers.

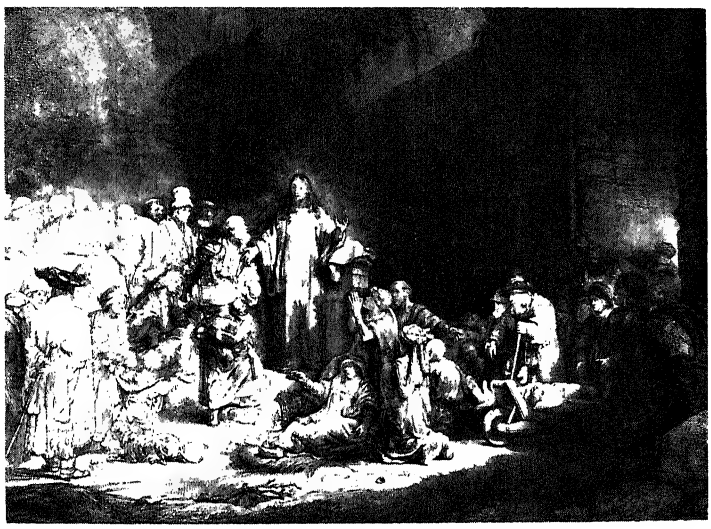
The picture's exceptional quality is a poetic mood created by romantic emphasis on details like these to stir our sensibilities. Romanticism is first of all a state of sensibility; the romantic temperament feels an obligation to develop sensibilities to their utmost rather than to discipline them. The braggadocio and display of the *Fournier-Sarlovèze* portrait are one manifestation of these ideas; the feminine languor and sentimental melancholy of *Christine Boyer* are another.

But these are portraits, where a painter is less vulnerable to rule and regulation than he is in official pictures. In official subjects intended for public display the contradiction between Gros's temperament



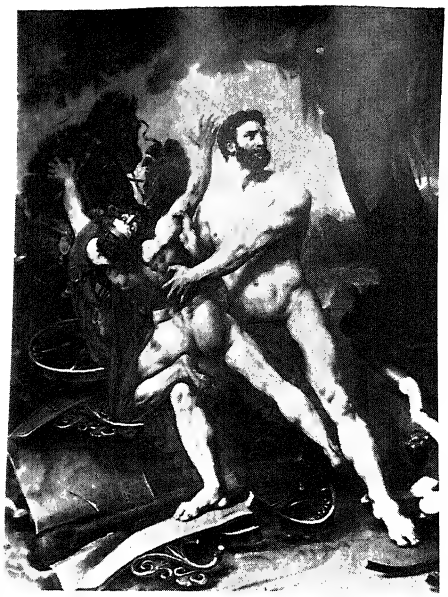
34. GROS: Detail from Figure 33.

35. REMBRANDT: *Christ Healing the Sick, c.* 1649. Etching, 10⅞ x 15¾". National Gallery, Washington, Rosenwald Collection.



and the classical style is more apparent and his struggle more painful. In 1804 he was commissioned to commemorate an incident when Napoleon, during his Near Eastern campaign of 1798–1799, visited the pesthouse in Jaffa where members of his troops were dying of the plague [33]. Actually the pesthouse was an ordinary hospital, but in the interest of dramatization Gros shifted the scene to a mosque. In doing so he reversed the approach used by David in, for instance, his *Marat:* instead of eliminating details to reduce the episode to its essentials, as David had done, and then reducing those essentials to an ultimate purity and simplicity almost abstract, Gros romantically added details and then used every possible means to increase their emotional impact. Colors are heightened, intensified, and contrasted. Whole passages are thrown into obscurity while others are pulled into strong light, reviving and going beyond David's theatrical lapse in his *Brutus* with its shadowed foreground figure. Hardly a detail has not been romanticized, but at the same time the picture clings to a token observance of the official tradition. For all their Orientalism, the arches of the mosque arranged across the background suggest the architectural flats of *The Horatii.* The nude figure lying face down in the foreground tearing at itself in agony may be romantic in its violence, but it is also a meticulous anatomical study in David's studio tradition. But the romantic focus of the picture is the nude bearded man who, dying, turns his head worshipfully toward the General [34]. The flexibility and the individualization of this figure make it the reverse of the conventionally proportioned, idealized, sculpturally modeled Davidian figure. And Gros's emotional conception of the subject, where Napoleon appears as a sort of Christ, touching the plague sores as if his bare hands would heal them miraculously, relates *Napoleon Visiting the Pesthouse at Jaffa* less closely to David than to a great romantic etching of the seventeenth century, Rembrandt's "Hundred Guilder Print," *Christ Healing the Sick* [35].

With the *Pesthouse* Gros came as close as he was ever to come to realising his



36. Gros: *Hercules and Diomede,* Salon of 1835. 167½ x 127¼". *Musée des Beaux Arts,* Toulouse.

potential as a romantic painter on the grand scale. (His *Battle of Eylau* is a second, but not a very close second.) After the fall of Napoleon, he attempted to find in idolization of the restored Bourbons the same spiritual support he had found in idolizing Napoleon I, but if his painting from that time on is any indication of his emotional life, this life was remarkably sterile. By 1820 the romantic movement was flourishing, but Gros, still obdurate, tried to go back to the sources of the classical style in order to recultivate it in noble purity. The experiment was a debilitating one. His work became mannered instead of noble, empty instead of pure, and his last picture, *Hercules and Diomede* [36], was laughed at in the Salon of 1835, the year of his suicide.

The romantic banner Gros might have carried had been picked up in the meanwhile by the young Théodore Géricault (1791–1824), and upon Géricault's early death at thirty-three, had passed to Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), an even younger painter whose work Gros had first admired and then, with his typical recoil from his spontaneous sympathies, disparaged.

The Romantic Declaration: Géricault and the "Raft of the Medusa"

On the 2d of July, 1816, the French frigate *Medusa* was wrecked in a storm off the west coast of Africa. When it became obvious that the vessel was lost, a raft was improvised from parts of it as it sank. Onto this makeshift were crowded 149 passengers and members of the crew. By the time they were sighted, only fifteen men had survived thirst, madness, and cannibalism. Géricault's picture of this horror [37] became for romanticism what *The Oath of the Horatii* had been for classicism a generation earlier, a public declaration of new principles and a standard around which a new school rallied in revolt.

Like David's earliest successes, the *Raft of the Medusa* attracted general attention because of its connection with exciting current events. Unlike David's, Géricault's picture actually represented the contemporary event in a contemporary way instead of allegorizing or symbolizing it in images of the past. The classicists fumed that the picture was vulgar and sensational, but this did not disturb a vulgar public interested in sensationalism. Nor was the public much impressed by the academic objection that here ordinary seamen were represented with the seriousness and on the grand scale appropriate only to the gods, heroes, and events of the ancient world. The *Medusa* had sunk in circumstances that were seized upon by the liberal party to attack the corruption of the administration (officers towing the raft from a lifeboat were accused of having cut it loose and left it adrift).

Géricault exhibited the picture in the Salon of 1819 (the official catalogue naïvely listed it only as *A Shipwreck,* to no one's confusion), and it was such an attraction that thereafter he traveled with it to England and made a considerable sum in gate receipts. The public that flocked to see the *Raft of the Medusa* came to see a sideshow novelty as much as it came to see a work of art. Certainly not one person in a hundred came to see a romantic manifesto, but this backdoor introduction of

37. GÉRICAULT: *Raft of the Medusa,* 1818. 193 x 282". Louvre, Paris.

large numbers of people to romantic painting was valuable to the movement, whether or not people were conscious of the picture's revolutionary character or its merits.

These merits were considerable, but their revolutionary character was only relative. To abandon David for new gods, Rubens and Michelangelo; to use color as an emotive element instead of as a decorative tint applied to sculpturesque forms; to subject the composition of a picture to its expressive character rather than to force expression into a standard composition—all this was counterrevolution against the Davidian revolution that had congealed into a formula, but none of it was innovational by historical precedent.

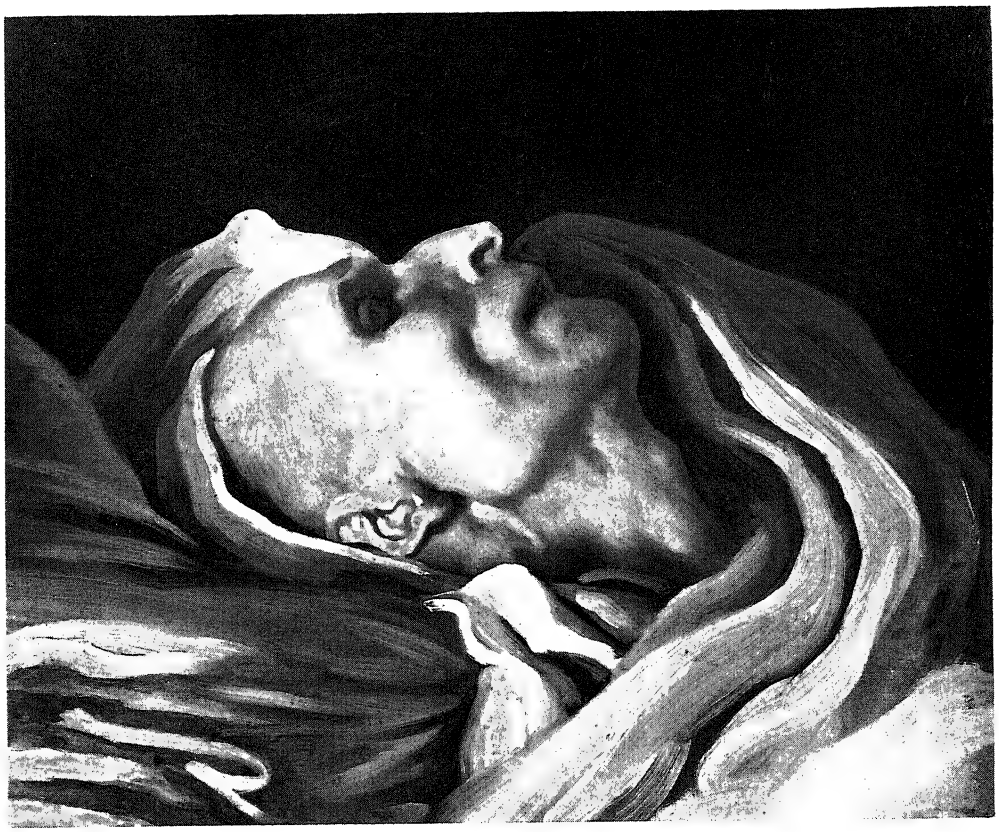
The composition of the *Raft of the Medusa* skips backward more than a century to recall the pictorial arrangements of seventeenth-century Italian painters, for example, Caravaggio, who made a similar revolution against the classical compositions of his own time. The survivors are shown in every attitude of anguish and despair. Sighting the rescue ship in the far distance, they have raised one of their number aloft on their shoulders.* He waves a shirt in a pitiable effort to attract attention. Straining, gesticulating, swooning, the *Medusa's* survivors are intertwined in a turbulent mass of forms recalling the cascades of damned souls in Last Judgments by Michelangelo and Rubens. The

* This particular survivor is a Negro; his presence is justified by historical fact, but his introduction into Géricault's picture is often pointed out as evidence of the romantic interest in exotic types.

38. GÉRICAULT: Detail from *Raft of the Medusa,* Figure 37.

forms rush upward across the canvas from left to right, culminating off balance in a jagged peak like a wave about to break and topple. Such grouping is obviously more expressive of movement and excitement and confusion than David's neat seesaw in *The Sabines,* frozen forever into the classical demand for symmetrical balance—although *The Sabines* is as much a subject of movement and excitement and confusion as is the *Raft.* Géricault's departure from seesaw balance seemed outrageous to the academicians, although he quite adequately brought his composition into equilibrium, countering the strong upward left-to-right movement by reversing it in the lines of the mast and ropes, lines that are continued and echoed in various of the figures on the raft itself.

What means does Géricault use to convey emotions of pity, terror, and horror? These emotions are not merely the result of the subject. Where David would have "purified," Géricault has intensified [38]. Irregular broken forms are more suggestive of excitement than smooth, even ones. Hence Géricault exaggerates all the natural irregularities, the hollows and protrusions, of heads and bodies that David would have smoothed out in submission to a preconceived ideal. Above all, Géricault dramatizes his forms by revealing them at maximum intensity in brilliant light and dense shadow. And where David's color—rather flat, very ornamental, "tasteful"—is simply color, the turgid darks and ominous greens



39. GÉRICAULT: After Death (study), *c.* 1818. 17¾ x 22". Art Institute of Chicago, Munger Collection (McKay Fund).

of the *Raft of the Medusa* are correlated to its subject. The picture is not a masterpiece of color, and it has darkened so much that we cannot be certain of its original scheme, but the conception of color as an expressive element is unquestionably present.

For his models David used the best-muscled and most perfectly proportioned human beings available to the studio, made precise imitative studies from them, and then modified his studies to bring them into correspondence with his recipe for the ideal type. Géricault abandons this idea that beauty is synonymous with perfection. A romantic, he finds beauty even in ugliness if ugliness reveals a state of soul. Instead of the athletes who posed for David, Géricault sought out the survivors of the *Medusa* and made sketches of them. One survivor was the ship's carpenter; he constructed for the artist a model of the raft. But all this was only documentation of literal fact. Valuable as it was, it did not necessarily correspond with expressive truth. So Géricault visited hospitals and sketched men as they were dying. He sketched in morgues [39] and madhouses. According to one story, he kept corpses in his room to make studies from them—until the neighbors complained.

For all its merits the *Raft of the Medusa* has some conspicuous disharmonies. The old man with his head supported on his fist [38] near the left edge of the raft is altogether out of key; he suggests a classical philosopher strayed from David's studio into this improbable situation. The body of the nude youth he partially supports, and that of the one to the lower right, head trailing in the water, are magnificent studies in themselves and give the impression of being the parts of the picture that

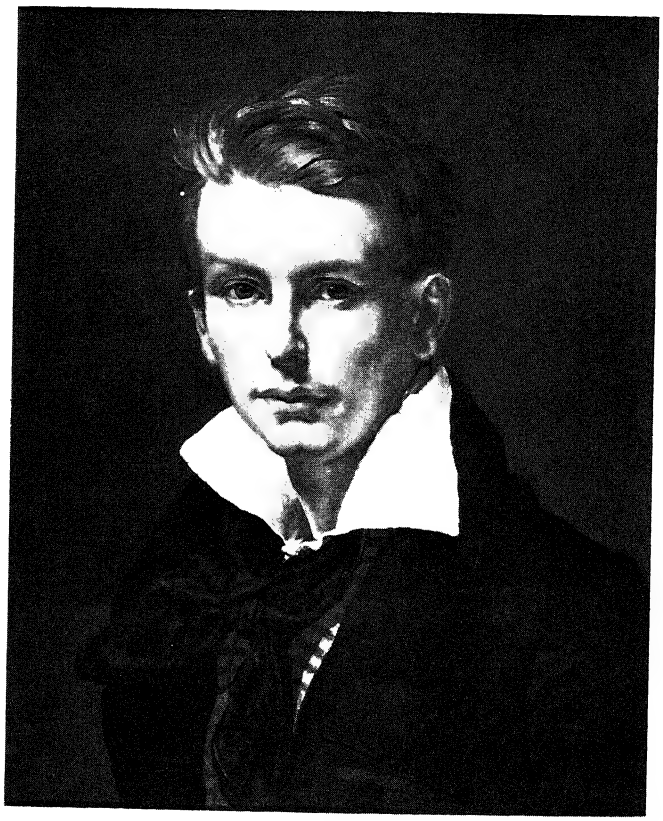
most interested the painter, but they are a little overconspicuous, becoming demonstration pieces. The whole picture, for that matter, may be only a first-rate studio exercise, admirable for the originality and courage of the devices it employs. But this is picking flaws in the work of a very young man whose achievement was to crystallize a new direction for painting. It is difficult to remember that Géricault was a student of Guérin, that candy-box classicist.

Géricault's reputation as a painter could rest on the *Raft of the Medusa* alone, and for that matter it very nearly does. The *Raft* was the only large or complicated composition he ever completed, although he left numerous sketches and some small versions for a similarly ambitious project, *Riderless Races at Rome* [40], races in which riderless horses were goaded into frenzies. He is an uneven painter. Sometimes his pigment has a coarse and heavy-handed quality, and his drawing may be so careless that legs and arms dangle as if shrunken or unattached within trousers or sleeves. At other times his draughtsmanship is masterful, his painting as strong and sure as it is sensitive, as in a *Portrait of a Young Man* [41] attributed to him.

Subjects of cruelty and morbidity occur so frequently in Géricault's work that his detractors hint at unhealthy preoccupations. But an interest in acute sensitivities even to the point of abnormal states of mind was inherent in romantic emotionalism. For the greatest romantics, suffering and violence may be transmuted into expressions of the human spirit struggling for release; and in exploring the dark areas of life the romantic finds beauty in unexpected places. Rembrandt was a romantic in the seventeenth century when he used derelicts and outcasts as models for tragic kings; in faces eroded by suffering he found inner beauties more expressive than the beauty of conventionally handsome sets of features or classically idealized ones. If Géricault is asked to meet such a standard, then it is true that he often seems merely a fascinated observer of madness and physical anguish for their own sakes. But his accurate studies of the insane have a special significance, because they were made

40. GÉRICAULT: *Riderless Races at Rome,* 1817. 17 x 23". Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

41. GÉRICAULT (?): *Portrait of a Young Man,* after 1820. 23¼ x 18¾". Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Grenville L. Winthrop Bequest.



42. DELACROIX: *Self-portrait,* 1837 or 1838. 25¼ x 20". Louvre, Paris.

at a time when different kinds of insanity were first being recognized by a few doctors, among them Géricault's friend, Doctor Georget, for whom he did a series of paintings.

When Géricault died at thirty-three,* his friend Delacroix was twenty-five. In a lifetime of battle against pedantry, Delacroix was to bring romantic painting to fruition.

Delacroix

As a student and young painter Delacroix was closely attached to Géricault. Géricault was eight years older, wealthy, adventurous, fond of high living, and knowledgeable about the world—about several worlds, in fact. Bohemianism was a natural by-product of the romantic premise that the artist's innate sensitivities are a gift so special that he is under a kind of moral obligation to develop them by indulging them to the fullest. Since these indulgences involve forays outside the bounds of the bourgeois conventions that dominated the nineteenth century, the early romantics confirmed the idea of the artist as a loose-living renegade from society—which still persists. Géricault was Delacroix's mentor as a youthful bohemian in Paris, although both men by birth were wealthy and of high social position.

But after his companion's death, Delacroix abandoned this experimental slumming for his natural habitat, the brilliant world where the upper bohemia of successful actors, writers, and painters overlapped the established order of social position and political intrigue. Here he was admired and sought after, but even while he was still a young man he began to withdraw into his work, seeing only the few people who continued to interest him as his own ideas began to crystallize. That the names of these people were great names (Chopin was his most intimate friend) was only coincidental.

Toward the end of his life Delacroix saw almost no one, remaining at work in his studio as a recluse, but still so glamorous a figure that when he did go out he was followed in the streets as a demigod by the young artists for whom he had become the symbol of revolution, independence, and integrity.

Nothing in Delacroix's life was so important to him as the theories he was developing through experiment and research. He never married, and although he had several liaisons and any number of what he described as "charming encounters," his grand passion was painting. But he was never one of those painters who could dash off a picture. He worked continually and hard; his total works are estimated at more than 12,000, although he was handicapped by various physical ailments, including a recurrent debilitating fever. The man Delacroix is well summed up in his own self-portrait [42] with its attraction, its suggestion of romantic fire, but in the end its

* This was in 1824; David died the following year. Géricault, who had once had ambitions to be a jockey, died of complications following a fall from a horse.

43. DELACROIX: *The Lion Hunt,* 1861. 30 x 38⅝". Art Institute of Chicago, Potter Palmer Collection.

hauteur. He was handsome, febrile, yet somehow unapproachable. Above all he disdained the emotional profligacy and the lack of discipline thought of as typically romantic, which was why he resented classification with such other romantic rebels as the writer Hugo, the musician Berlioz, and, above all, the painter Boulanger, who was Hugo's choice as the official leader of the romantic school. As for Aurore Dupin, the woman who called herself George Sand and led her own life with the romantic lack of discipline of the heroines of her novels, Delacroix knew her long and intimately but referred to her commiseratingly as "Poor Aurore."

Delacroix: His "Classicism"

By the standard of swooning emotionalism and self-indulgence, Delacroix was not a romantic spirit at all. By any standard he was one of the most acutely, objectively analytical men who ever painted a picture. And to understand his art in such typical pictures as *The Lion Hunt* [43] and *The Abduction of Rebecca* [44], we must recognize certain qualities that seem contradictory to romanticism. Delacroix's romanticism is theoretical rather than felt, calculated rather than inborn. He regarded himself as a true classicist, as opposed to the false classicists who merely imitated

44. DELACROIX: *The Abduction of Rebecca*, 1846. 39½ x 32¼". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Wolfe Fund.

classical precedents without understanding the classical spirit. True classicism is concerned with generalizing human experience into universal symbols. Venus is not a beautiful woman, but all beauty; Minerva is not a local bluestocking, but a symbol of the majesty and power of the intellect. The kings in classical tragedy are not certain men who had certain experiences as rulers of kingdoms, but symbols of mankind in its nobility and its frailty. Romanticism, on the other hand, is concerned with the individual and his search not so much for the meaning of life as for the meaning of his own individual life. But the art of Delacroix shows us that creative genius transcends the limits of a category. Categorized as romantic, his Arabs, lions, pashas, warriors, and all the rest do not end as specific individuals represented in one dramatic moment of their lives. They are images of the total emotional life of humanity. The poet and critic Baudelaire called Delacroix's work "a kind of remembrance of the greatness and native passion of the universal man."

Delacroix's effect of romantic vehemence was achieved painstakingly; he invented ways and means to achieve it his turbulent forms in all their complexity are as carefully patterned as are David's static, stylized ones. The famous "drunken

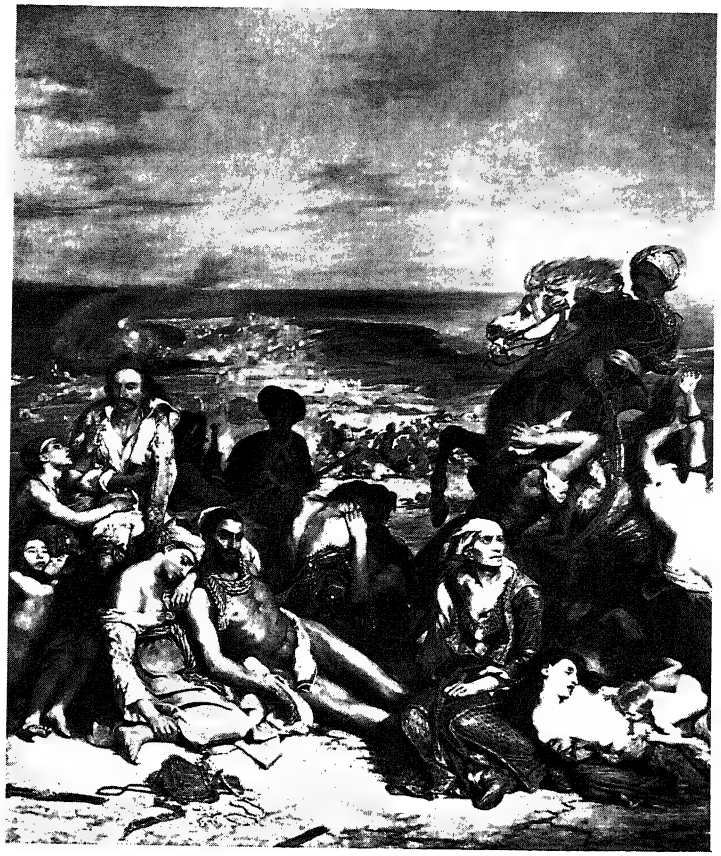
broom" with which the classicists accused him of painting was not drunken at all. The breadth, irregularity, and apparent spontaneity of his brush stroke was produced with as much care as any classical painter took in smoothing out his surface to an impeccable polish. The colors that appear to swarm across Delacroix's canvases, as if jostling and interrupting one another, are selected and juxtaposed by no chance but in accord with theories so highly developed that alongside them the classicist's use of color as a decorative accessory is elementary. Romanticism is emotional, but Delacroix's emotionalism is achieved intellectually. This paradox must be accepted if his work is to be understood.

Delacroix: Early Works and Scandals

Delacroix's career was opened with an early success, *Dante and Vergil in Hell* [45]. This painting, showing the two poets crossing the River Styx, was exhibited in the Salon of 1822 when Delacroix was twenty-four years old. Géricault's true masters, Rubens and Michelangelo, had become Delacroix's also, and they inspired the agitated and tormented forms of the picture. The nude male in the water alongside the boat is especially Michelangelesque; he might be the Adam from the creation scene on the Sistine ceiling in a variation of pose. Delacroix's teacher Guérin was horrified by *Dante and Vergil* and advised him not to exhibit it, but Gros, who was a member of the Salon jury that year, admired it so much that he had it framed at his own expense. Delacroix could not afford a frame; he had lost the fortune he would have inherited from his parents, now dead, in a disastrous lawsuit with another family.

It was at this time that Adolphe Thiers, a shrewd statesman but a man of little taste in the arts, came to Delacroix's rescue with the "mysterious" official patronage that continued, with only occasional interruptions, throughout the artist's life. Although he was the putative son of the French minister to the Netherlands, a man well established in influential circles, Delacroix was probably the actual son of a much more influential man, the statesman Talleyrand. Various coincidences support conclusions that could be drawn from his strong resemblance to Talleyrand, and nothing but the presence of an influential behind-the-scenes sponsor explains why Delacroix was virtually a ward of the State after his parents' deaths. His pictures were loathed and feared by Salon juries and vituperated by official critics, but again and again they appeared in the official exhibitions and were purchased by the government. Delacroix was awarded important commissions for murals in public buildings (the Palais Royal, the Palais Bourbon, the Luxembourg, and the Louvre among them) over the heads of the established hacks who would ordinarily have received these lucrative plums, as well as other semiofficial and private commissions where influence was usually more important than talent. Thus the government unwittingly acquired masterpiece after masterpiece and became, in effect, the medium for discrediting the classical hangers-on who were entrenched in its official schools. The dismay of the academicians can be imagined when Thiers manipulated the purchase of *Dante and Vergil* by the State. Delacroix was regarded as an irreverent upstart from this time forward.

45. DELACROIX: *Dante and Vergil in Hell*, 1821–22. 73½ x 94½". Louvre, Paris.



46. DELACROIX: *Scenes of the Massacres of Scio,* 1824. 166 x 138½" Louvre, Paris.
47. DELACROIX: Detail from Figure 46 (extreme left of picture).

Two years later, in 1824, Delacroix came into greater prominence with his *Scenes of the Massacres of Scio* [46, 47], of which the Academy made a scandal. Even Gros, who had defended *Dante and Vergil,* reversed his opinion of Delacroix and called *Massacres of Scio* the massacre of painting.

There were routine objections to Delacroix's choice of a contemporary subject,* but what really appalled Gros and the other academicians was Delacroix's use of color. *Massacres of Scio* had come to the jury as a fine example of sound, adequately conventional painting and had been accepted for exhibition. But in the interval between acceptance and the opening of the Salon, Delacroix repainted it. Painters were customarily allowed to retouch or varnish their work after acceptance, but it happened that Delacroix experienced one of the transforming revelations of his artistic life, and was impelled to transform *Massacres of Scio* as a result: he had seen a picture called *The Hay Wain* [313] sent to the Paris Salon that year by the English landscapist Constable.

Constable painted by juxtaposing spots of color rather than blending them. By French academic technique of the time, a passage changing from one tint to another

* As an episode in the Greek-Turkish War, the population of the island of Scio, where 100,000 Greeks had lived, had just been reduced to 9,000 in one of the most terrible massacres in the history of human cruelty. *Scenes of the Massacres of Scio* was in part inspired by Delacroix's admiration of the arch-romantic spirit and romantic poet Lord Byron, whose chivalrous participation in the Greek war cost him his life at Missolonghi in the same year. Delacroix also painted a *Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi* as a tribute to Byron and a lament for him as well as a memorial to the Greek insurrectionists.

would be meticulously smoothed out or "blended" (there were special brushes for this), but Constable applied his colors in strokes of graduated shades, so that the transition was made in a series of easily perceived jumps, juxtaposed rather than mushed together. The result was a greater freshness, vividness, and life to the color, as well as a sense of more immediate contact between painter and observer. The painter's presence is suggested when we can follow each stroke of his brush; whether we are aware of it or not, our participation in such a painting is greater than it is before a highly polished work where the technique is, so to speak, invisible. Delacroix once said that painting is a bridge between the thought of the painter and the thought of the observer, and Constable's bridge must have seemed to him a more direct and effective one than he had known before. In repainting *Massacres of Scio* Delacroix began the experiments with color that were to occupy him for the rest of his life and were to be enlarged upon by several generations of painters into our own century.* He freed color from the restrictions David had put on it; he revived some of its uses as he observed them in the eighteenth-century painters David had rejected, and he added new ones of his own.

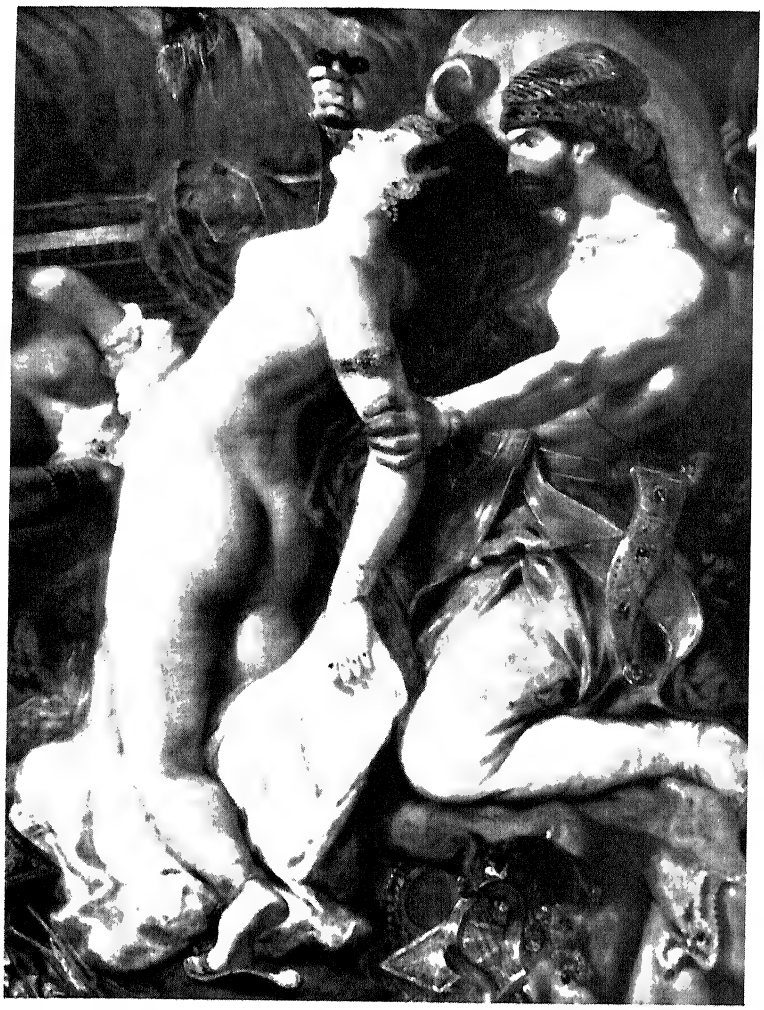
By Davidian formula color is, in effect, nothing more than a decorative dye applied to carefully drawn and modeled forms, as though each object had been completely modeled without color, as though it had been carved in white stone, and the color then washed over it as a photograph might be tinted. The color of each form—blue drapery, green leaf, gray wall—is held concisely within neat, unyielding contours. But with Delacroix the color explodes, shattering boundaries and unifying all forms with flecks and bits of pigment related to other areas. "Color is a merging of reflections," Delacroix said. An area of blue may be shot through with purples and greens and oranges; a passage of flesh (to which David would have given a smooth, uniform, pinkish tint) will be enriched with green in the shadow, blue in the highlights.

Obviously this aspect of painting is difficult to cope with in verbal description and black and white illustration. Even color illustration is not too much help with the reduction in size and loss of texture involved. But even in black and white it may be sensed that David's color exists only as an overlay. It may be bright and clear, but in Delacroix it is vivid and rich because variations are bound into variations of form; form and color enhance one another. A shift from one color to another as a form projects or recedes in painted space may either emphasize or minimize the projection or recession. Impossible as it is to demonstrate these simple points except in the presence of the paintings themselves, it is important nevertheless to remember that for Delacroix color *was* painting, it was the structure of painting as well as the basis of painting's expressive nature. All this will be more clear in retrospect as we see the painting of the century following Delacroix, because his color is the foundation of theories that build on one another in regular sequence, and are still developing.

Delacroix: His Orientalism

In 1827 Delacroix painted his largest and most ambitious demonstration picture, and the only one that was a failure with both classicists and romantics, *The Death of Sardanapalus*. The subject reflects the vogue for Orientalism that was a strong element in romantic painting and literature, offering as it did all the exotic color and savage passion denied by classical modera-

* *The Hay Wain* is a large picture, and loses pertinence as a technical example when reduced to the size of a page. But some of Constable's freshness and freedom as a manipulator of paint may be seen in other illustrations of his work [312, 314]. The question may be asked why Constable's picture was acceptable to the Salon jury if Delacroix's adoption of its technique was found so shocking. One answer is that *The Hay Wain* is a picturesque landscape and hence, by academic category, not a picture of first importance. A formal and pretentious subject had to observe the rules more closely. Also, *The Hay Wain* was painted by an Englishman. Frenchmen have never been able to take English painting very seriously. They find it charming but are unable to think of it as important, and in painting of little importance some eccentricity is not objectionable.



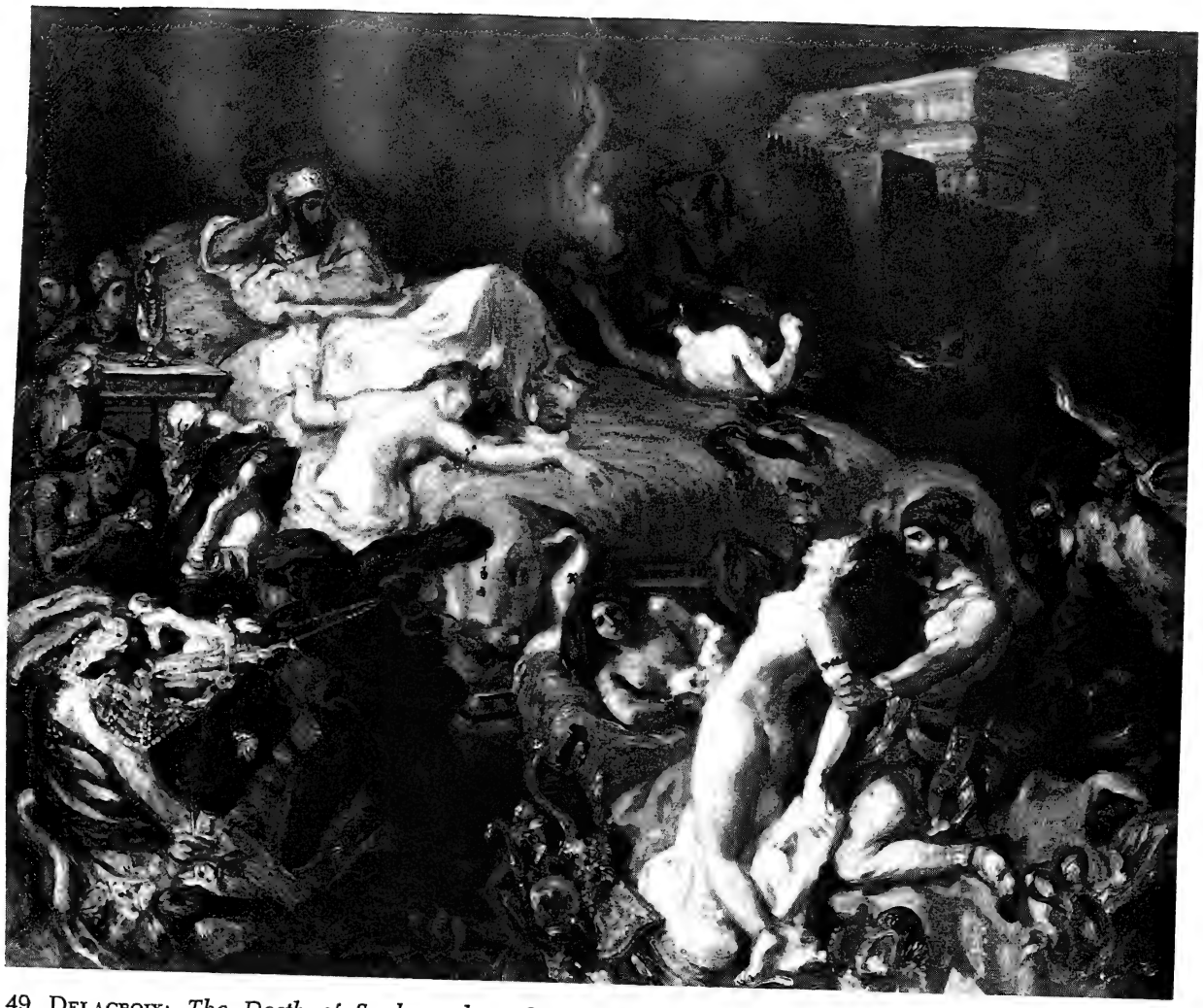
48. DELACROIX: Detail, figures about life size, from *The Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827 version. Louvre, Paris.

tion. But among the romantics only Victor Hugo liked *Sardanapalus*, which was at least consistent since, having shown little perception of Delacroix's virtues, he now found virtues in a painting where everyone else found defects.

The potentate Sardanapalus, preparing to immolate himself, is shown on his funeral pyre, which is concealed beneath cushions and a glorious rose-colored fabric, while slaves bring in his favorite wives, horses, and dogs and cut their throats in order that nothing Sardanapalus has enjoyed in life may be enjoyed by anyone else after his death. Jewels and great heaps of other objects are spread around in opulent confusion. The confusion was objected to, also the "vulgarity," a favorite word with the critics, who were to continue to apply it over a period of some seventy-five years to the quality of life in any painting not classically stillborn. Oddly enough, if any shortcomings are apparent in *Sardanapalus* today, they do not lie in its confusion, which is calculated, but in the excess of this calculation, which reduces the vitality of the frenzied subject. *Sardanapalus* has passages of superb painting; the flesh of the central female figure [48], the jewels, the stuffs, are as rich as even Rubens could have made them. But the total effect, while gorgeous, is more gorgeous than passionate. Delacroix himself was dissatisfied, and seventeen years later, in 1844, he repeated the picture in much smaller dimensions [49]. In the years between the two versions he had brought his theories to maturity.

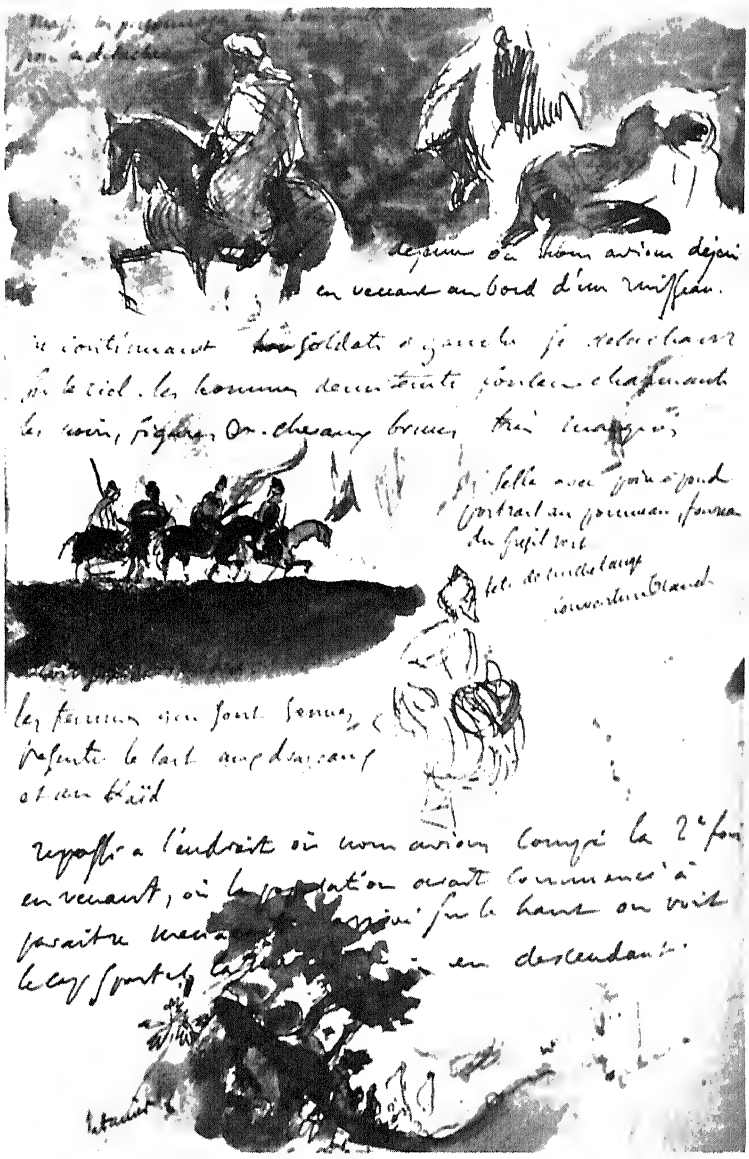
The remarkable thing about the late version is that while it was virtually seventeen years in the painting, it has all the effect of spontaneous emotional fervor. When Delacroix said, "All precautions have to be taken to make execution swift and decisive" in order not to lose "the extraordinary impression accompanying the conception" of a picture, he was denying the laborious methods of classicism. But he was denying as well, by the words *precautions* and *decisive*, the hit-or-miss improvisation by which an artist may try to capture the "extraordinary impression accompanying the conception" in the heat of the moment. Delacroix's sketches frequently have this quality of improvisation; there is a sketch in the Louvre for *Sardanapalus* that has it, but the sketch also has the formless, ambiguous passages that are inevitable at the same time. Delacroix's problem was the problem of the romantic creator in any of the arts to give form to emotional experience without sacrificing its quality of immediacy.

In a subject of violent action the quality of immediacy cannot be retained within the seesaw balance of Davidian composition, as has already been pointed out in the *Raft of the Medusa*, where the composition was built on a strong diagonal movement. But



49. DELACROIX: *The Death of Sardanapalus*, 1844 version. 29¾ x 37". Collection Henry P. McIlhenny, Philadelphia.

the upward rush of Géricault's shipwrecked figures is still essentially an upward rush across the surface of the picture. In *Sardanapalus* we are led *back into* "space" created by the painter, something like the space of a large stage. The Sabines and the Horatii enact their dramas on the shallow area between footlights and curtain. In the *Raft of the Medusa* the space is hardly deeper, although theoretically the ocean background stretches to the horizon. But in *The Death of Sardanapalus* the curtain has gone up and the stage is filled with figures and trappings surging into its depths, backward and across to the climactic figure of the dying potentate. It is fine theater, and very romantic theater. It is also composition into the picture depth on a diagonal. The advantages of this kind of composition should be apparent if the effect of turbulence in Delacroix's picture is contrasted with the rigidity of David's. Each type of composition, of course, achieves its own end. By Delacroix's aesthetic, David's composition was obvious and limited. By David's, Delacroix's would have seemed overcomplicated, overdramatic. These contrasting uses of space—shallow and defined, or deep and free—characterize, respectively, neo-classical and romantic composition.



50. Delacroix: Page from his Moroccan journal, April 11, 1832. Ink and watercolor. *Bibliothèque d'Art et d'Archéologie*, Paris.

Between the two versions of *Sardanapalus* Delacroix absorbed the second determining experience of his life—second only to his discovery of color in *Massacres of Scio*. He had tried to develop his theories of color in various Oriental subjects, as offering the most appropriate raw material, but his Orientalism, as in *Sardanapalus*, was of a storybook kind, concocted from hearsay, legend, and the accumulated fantasies of other writers and painters. Then in 1832 he made a trip to Morocco.* From the silvery light of Paris and the civilized emotional climate of that city with its pale and cultivated inhabitants, he was plunged into a world where he was surrounded by half-barbaric figures, golden skinned or black, robed, turbaned, or naked, moving among strange vegetation and strange architecture or against the even stranger blankness of desert sand and desert sky. Everything was revealed in a blazing light where colors were vivified and contrasts were exaggerated beyond anything Delacroix had imagined at second hand.

The first entries about this trip, in the journal where for years he had kept an orderly record of his activities and theories, are the fragmentary and disconnected scribblings of a man clutching at new images so exciting that he is in terror of being unable to absorb them:

". . . the sea a dark greenish blue like a fig, the hedges yellow at the top because of the bamboo, green at the base on account of the aloes . . . the sons of the caid. The oldest one, his dark blue burnous; caftan of a canary yellow . . . a Jewess, red skullcap, white drapery, black dress. Heads of Moors like those of Rubens, nostrils and lips rather coarse, bold eyes. Rusty cannon. Graves amid the aloes and the iris. The almond trees in flower. The Persian lilacs. The little white house in the shadow amidst the dark orange trees. The horse through the trees. The red veil. The beautiful eyes. Wax torches. Tumult."

Everywhere these notes are interspersed with sketches, quick, vivid, spotted with bright notes of watercolor [50]. Delacroix saw everything he had ever imagined, and more—fantastic banquets and entertain-

* Delacroix was attached to a mission organized under a young aristocrat, the Count de Mornay. The year before, France had made its conquest of Algeria, and the sultan of Morocco was a touchy neighbor. De Mornay's mission was to conclude a treaty of good will. He had met Delacroix in the upper bohemia of the arts that they both frequented, and attached the artist to his mission at the urging of a sprightly creature named Mlle. Mars, a comédienne and an enthusiastic collector of scalps among the infatuated gallants and intellectuals of her day.

ments in the sultan's palace, local ceremonies among the people, weddings and funerals, and from a window in Tangiers the hysteria of a fanatic religious sect. Everywhere the world was strange, wild, and wonderful.

His notebooks and his recollections were his storehouse after his return. Other painters might have been content to use the exotic material for its inherent color and novelty. But Delacroix was not interested in painted travelogues. The value of the material to him was that he found through it, at last, his synthesis of human emotion and the intellectual devices for its interpretation; the picturesqueness of the material is incidental; the depth of the Moroccan experience is apparent not only in pictures directly connected with it, such as *The Lion Hunt* [43], but also in *The Abduction of Rebecca* [44], which is an incident from Scott's *Ivanhoe*, and the Biblical *Good Samaritan* [51], and in all Delacroix's other work where he realizes Baudelaire's "remembrance of the greatness and native passion of the universal man."

Delacroix: Recognition and Followers

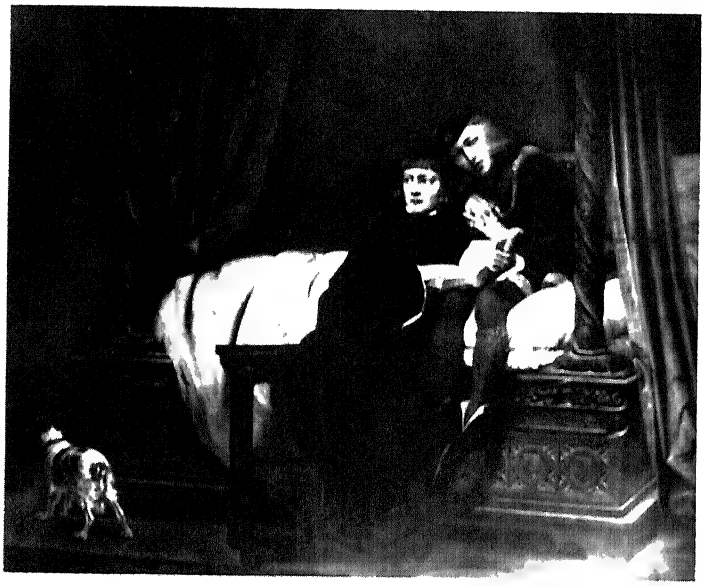
French artists may revile the Academy and may be reviled by it, may abhor the practices of the men who control it, may oppose everything it stands for at the moment—but they continue to venerate it as an institution and as an abstract idea, a symbol of the prestige of the arts in the national life of their country. No matter what their experience of academic abuses, all Frenchmen eligible for election to the Institute of France* covet one of its chairs, and Delacroix was no exception. He made eight applications, which were rejected, and a ninth which was accepted in 1857, six years before his death.

Even so, the official world continued to snub him on most occasions. In 1861 he completed a set of three murals in the Church of St. Sulpice, after twelve years of work filled with interruptions. The Superintendent of Fine Arts, who was the philistine Count de Nieuwerkerke, refused to look at them; the court and the world of official painting also stayed away from the opening exhibition. Such men as Théophile Gautier and Baudelaire came and admired the pictures tremendously, but whether they were admiring them as mural paintings or as a manifestation of Delacroix's perseverance and integrity in the solution of a difficult problem is a real question. Today, similarly, the St. Sulpice murals are likely to be most praised by those admirers of Delacroix who like to see, in his mural of *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, a symbol of the painter's struggle for the fulfillment of his admirable theories. The other subjects were *Heliodorus Driven from the Temple* and, on the ceiling vault, so small and so ill lit that it is seldom noticed, *St. Michael Killing the Dragon.* Compared with his great easel pictures, these are curiously static, dry, overstudied compositions.

Even while Delacroix was being snubbed, the romantic ideal had been vulgarized by his imitators in ways sufficiently emasculated to establish a pseudoromantic product as a standard Salon item. Thus on the coattails of second-raters he was finally accepted as the leader of a recognized school. In the important Salon of 1855, which will be described in some detail later in this book, a room was set aside for some forty of his paintings, amounting to a retrospective of his career. He was elected to the Institute two years later, and he exhibited in the Salon for the last time two years after that, in 1859, with eight pictures. The year of his death, 1863, coincides with the date of the *Salon des Refusés*, also to be treated in detail later, an event that divides the art of the nineteenth century with a boundary as sharp as the one established

* The Institute of France is composed of five Academies, as follows: (1) the French language, (2) literature, (3) social sciences and history, (4) mathematics and physical sciences, (5) fine arts. Each Academy is self-perpetuating; upon the death of a member a new one is elected for life from aspirants who have presented applications. Intrigue and favoritism are inevitable in the elections, and Academy membership has included some of the most trifling talents, but it has also included eventually most of the great ones who have lived long enough.

51. DELACROIX: *The Good Samaritan*, 1850. 13¾ x 11". Philadelphia Museum of Art. Anonymous loan.



52. DELAROCHE: *The Children of Edward*, 1830. 71 x 84". Louvre, Paris.

between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the Revolution and David.

Like David among classical painters, Delacroix is unapproached by any of his romantic contemporaries. This is less surprising than in the case of David, since Delacroix did not teach. But he was imitated. His most superficial imitator was a tremendous success: while Delacroix struggled to achieve his synthesis of human emotions, Paul Delaroche (1797–1856) capitalized on the romantic sentiment of the period by plagiarizing whatever elements of Delacroix's art had become generally palatable. Delaroche was not a true romantic. He was an unimaginative illustrator of historical anecdotes possessed of romantic interest. Historical novels were in great vogue, and Delaroche offered their pictorial counterparts. His pictures are quite objective reproductions of models posed in medieval and Renaissance trappings against period backgrounds. The best known are *The Children of Edward* [52], showing the two little sons of Edward IV in the Tower awaiting execution, and *The Death of Queen Elizabeth*. Both pictures are still seen now and then, and until recently they were used as illustrations in every other schoolbook on English history and literature. Delaroche, only a few months older than Delacroix, was elected to the Institute on the strength of such tepid narratives. Upon Delaroche's death Delacroix, finally elected, assumed his imitator's chair, an irony that comes to mind first when Delaroche's name is mentioned nowadays, because it is the only circumstance lending any interest to his career. He was a student of Gros.

Some other mentionable French romantic painters are listed here, in order of birth:

Alexandre Gabriel Decamps (1803–1860), a respectable painter, was trained as a classicist but revolted early against the tradition. He is discussed later in connection with the Salon of 1855, where he shared honors with Delacroix.

Eugène Devéria (1805–1865), a pupil of Girodet, for a while seemed on the point of major romantic achievement. After a great success in his Salon debut of 1827

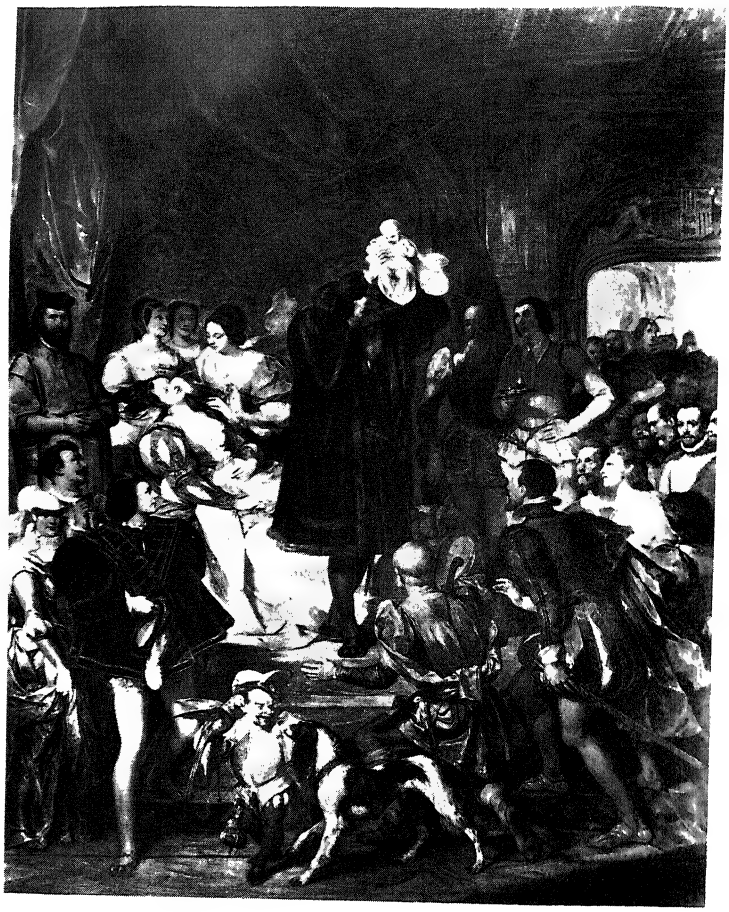
with *The Birth of Henry IV* [53], he failed his promise and became a dry and unoriginal painter of history pictures, ending as a second-rate Delaroche. *The Birth of Henry IV* has recently been cleaned up and rehung in the Louvre. For such a huge painting, it is rather easy to pass by; perhaps the competition of *The Death of Sardanapalus* facing it on the opposite wall is too much. But upon examination it is seen to contain many passages of good solid craftsmanship. To find much more is difficult.

Prosper Georges Antoine Marilhat (1811–1847) first appeared in the Salon of 1831. Thereafter he traveled widely in Syria, Egypt, and Palestine, his special version of the Oriental vogue having to do with desert landscapes, caravans, and Oriental cities [54]. He painted with an agreeable illustrative honesty and a nice feeling for pigment.

Eugène Fromentin (1820–1876) was a painter and writer whose Orientalism was derived first from Marilhat, later from Delacroix. As a painter he had considerable facility, but as time goes on his pictures look more and more like attractive exercises in the manner of other men. His writing has retained the freshness that has begun to stale in his painting. Much of his criticism is unusually perceptive.

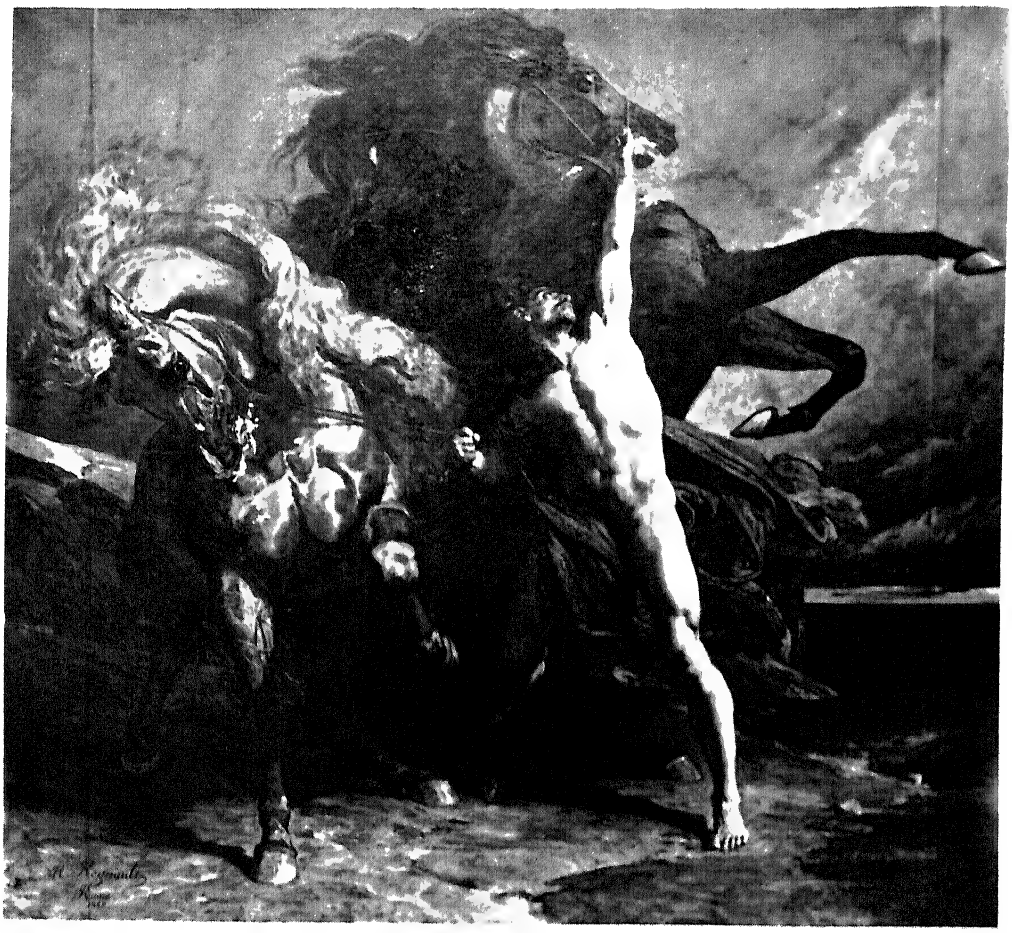
Alfred Dehodencq (1843–1882) had a satisfactory Salon career; his work is being revived today on a small scale.

Henri Regnault (1843–1871), as his dates show, was a long generation younger than Delacroix. In 1866, at which time Delacroix had been dead for three years, Regnault won the *Prix de Rome* with a classical subject. In Italy he painted his well-known *Automédon and the Horses of Achilles* [55], a stirring picture that might have struck Delacroix himself as promising in its romantic excitement, although it still smacks a bit of brilliant student work. With a first medal in the Salon, a brilliant colorist, intelligent and industrious, he seemed set not only to make a conventional success but, at the same time, to continue and build



53. Devéria: *The Birth of Henry IV*, 1827. 190 x 154". Louvre.

54. Marilhat: *Oriental Caravanserai*, date unknown. 10¾ x 17". Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.



55. H. Regnault: *Automédon and the Horses of Achilles*, 1868. 124 x 129½". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

56. Michel: *The Old Chateau*, date unknown. 20½ x 27⅞". Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.

upon the art of Delacroix. But Regnault was killed at the age of twenty-eight in the Franco-Prussian War.

One other name should be remembered, this time a man who was even earlier than Géricault, Georges Michel (1783–1848). He is a rather isolated painter who is frequently grouped with Géricault among the first romantics. He painted picturesque squalor, bent trees, lonely ruined towers in dramatic silhouette against golden skies [56], referring to Rembrandt for some of his strong effects of chiaroscuro. As a forerunner of romanticism, Michel is still much respected in France but is almost forgotten elsewhere.

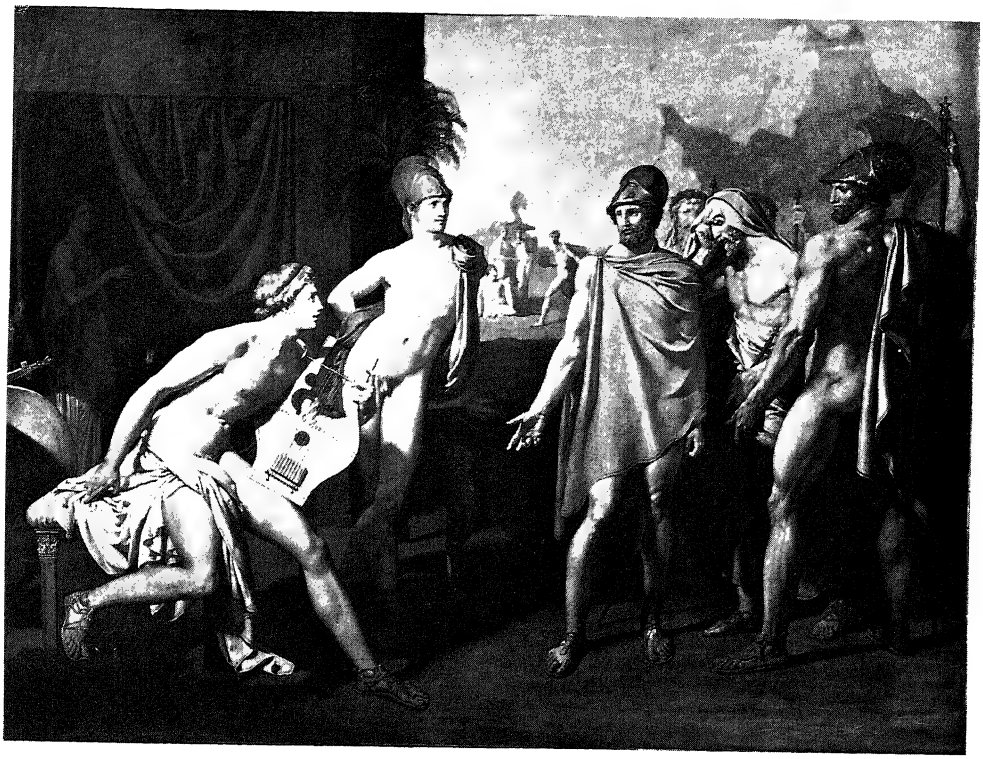
CHAPTER 3

Ingres

The Pedant

In 1824, the year of Delacroix's romantic blast with *Massacres of Scio*, the classical school was without a leader. David was not only a very old man but in exile; Gros was floundering and compromising. Both Gérard and Guérin were alive, but neither had the qualifications for leadership. But that year a self-exiled student of David's returned from Italy. He had been working on a large religious picture, *The Vow of Louis XIII* [63], a commission for the cathedral in his provincial home city of Montauban. He brought *The Vow of Louis XIII* with him for exhibition in the Salon, much concerned as to its reception, since he had been in and out of academic favor for a long time and had no idea whether he would be attacked again or received as the prodigal son. There had been a hint that he might be in the Academy's good graces; to his surprise he had been elected its corresponding member in Florence a few months earlier.

The Vow of Louis XIII was a success. The Salon that year centered around it and the scandalous *Massacres of Scio*. Jean August Dominique Ingres (1780–1867) became the new leader of classicism, and for the rest of their lives he and Delacroix were identified as opposing generals in the classic-romantic imbroglio. At times the conflict came down to personal terms—at least on Ingres's part. Eighteen years older than Delacroix, he was an old man before he ever offered his hand to his romantic adversary. Delacroix recognized Ingres's virtues; Ingres never conceded any to Delacroix, perhaps because in his heart he felt ill equipped for the struggle he had en-



57. INGRES: *The Envoys of Agamemnon,* 1801, *Prix de Rome.* 43¼ x 61". *École des Beaux Arts,* Paris. (Photo Giraudon.)

tered into and was jealous of the ease and flourish with which Delacroix seemed to lead his life. Ingres was a pedestrian personality, stubborn and plodding, while Delacroix was spectacular and aristocratic in contrast to Ingres's humble origin and bourgeois ambition. Delacroix painted brilliantly and theorized even more brilliantly. Ingres's pronouncements were stuffy. From all he wrote and said, it is possible to cull only here and there a phrase not embarrassing in obviousness, obtuseness, and pedantry. He was a poor talker.

But he was a great painter. His own art did not prove the validity of the dogmas he defended; it showed only that no dogma, not even one self-imposed, could stifle a creative spirit so powerful that it demanded expression on any terms. As the official leader of classical painting Ingres had to fight not only Delacroix but a second and even more formidable adversary—the romantic painter who existed within himself. Unlike Gros, who recognized a similar conflict and subjugated his personal expression to classical doctrine, Ingres seems never to have realized where the problem lay. He was shocked and puzzled when classical painters found his work unclassical. He failed to see that romanticism goes deeper than the surface of strong light and shade, swirling action, broken color, and asymetrical composition, none of which he used. He also failed to see that classicism goes deeper than controlled outline, flat color, tight surface, and symmetrical balance, all of which he continued to use obediently. His attitude toward the Academy remained that of the brilliant student intent upon making good marks to win first prize, even when he was the Academy's leader and spokesman.

Ingres was a great painter in spite of himself. Just how this happened is best explained by examining a group of typical pictures in chronological order.

The Student

At seventeen Ingres came to Paris and entered David's studio. His grandfathers had been a tailor and a wig-maker; his father was a carver of sculptural ornaments. At fourteen the boy was playing the violin in an orchestra to make a little money.* Later he won prizes in drawing, and in Paris under David he continued to win them. He became David's favorite student—for a while. David painted his portrait, as affectionate, engaging, and informal a little picture as the great disciplinarian ever allowed himself to do. By 1800 Ingres was assisting David in important work. He painted, for instance, the classical standing lamp that is a conspicuous part of the portrait of *Madame Récamier* [14]. But about this time an unexplained but serious rift developed between Ingres and David. It was never mended.

Ingres had done well in preliminary competitions for the *Prix de Rome* and now, in 1801, he won it. The full subject of his competition picture was *The Envoys of Agamemnon, Sent to Achilles to Urge Him to Fight, Find Him in His Tent with Patroclus Singing of the Feats of Heroes* [57]. As an exercise in the design of male nudes, ranging from the too-muscular giant at the right to the too-lissome youths at the left,† the picture has all the artificiality, the precision, and the respect for recipe of a typical *Prix* winner. It also holds some prophecy of Ingres's future work, the germs of his originality. This originality began to appear during the next few years, to the distress of his sponsors.

The state of France's finances in 1801 was so precarious that, although Ingres had won the *Prix*, no money could be found to send him to Rome. In the five years before the money was available, the State gave him a studio and an allowance-in-disguise in the form of occasional commissions. Ingres also did a number of portraits on his own and exhibited in the Salon. But bizarre elements began to appear in his work—bizarre, that is, by the standard of conformity expected of a *Prix de Rome* man—and they culminated in his portrait of *Madame Rivière* [58], exhibited with several others in the Salon of 1806.

Madame Rivière is a masterpiece of linear design. Present everywhere, its pattern is most apparent in the folds of the gauzy scarf and the large shawl flowing through the lower half of the picture. Here sinuous, there suddenly straightening, here moving slowly, next breaking into swirls or ripples, the lines defining folds and hems have their own beauty as abstract rhythmic patterns more important than their function as description. For the first time Ingres was called "Gothic," an epithet that was to haunt him for life.

Gothic was a term of opprobrium in the classical vocabulary because it summarized the qualities antithetical to *classic*, and the classicists had never admitted the possibility of more than one standard of beauty. In late Gothic sculpture and painting, drapery was represented in exaggerated bunchings and knottings, the opposite of classical simplicity, in patterns of nervous intensity the opposite of classical repose. The intensity is not reflected in Ingres's particular and very personal use of line in the *Madame Rivière*, a graceful and seductive picture. It shares with Gothic art an interest in the edges and contours of bunched forms, but these are organized into a different, more flowing kind of pattern as a way of drawing form and composing a picture. Each line is a delight to follow individually, full of its own sensitivity, invention, and variety, yet no line exists independently. Each one mutually supports and is supported by every other one. The over-all pictorial structure is an integration of broad general movements within which the individual lines are intertwined. A major current flows in a long curve from the bottom of the picture along the hand and up the arm, then along the shoulders where it merges with a quieter, horizontal, stabilizing pattern running from one side of the frame to the other. Such "currents" may be picked up

* He continued to play the violin all his life, as a diversion and a solace; hence the phrase "*violon d'Ingres*" by which the French mean any cherished and sustaining hobby.

† —all identifiable according to the story in the *Iliad*, which Ingres studied carefully.

58. INGRES: *Madame Rivière,* Salon 1806. Oval 45⅝ x 35½". Louvre. (Photo Giraudon.)

anywhere in the picture; each one merges or divides along its course to flow into or serve as origin for others.

Consciously or not, Ingres violated the classical dogma of accurate or idealized proportion to create this rhythmic structure. It is true that if the lady should stand up, her arms hanging at her sides would be of grotesquely different lengths. The right one is elongated and the left one, resting on the pillow, is shortened. These distortions were dictated while the abstract pattern was being evolved from a series of natural forms. The long even curve of the

right arm establishes the main direction of the linear currents eddying around it; the left one reverses these currents, checks them and brings us into quieter areas (the pillow and the bodice) that serve to relieve and accentuate the more active areas surrounding them. Except to a dogmatist the distortion would be neither noticeable nor disturbing. It is even less noticeable that the figure of Madame Rivière exists ambiguously from the waist down. The linear currents are so fascinating in themselves that it makes no difference that the disposition of the clothing describes only a token relationship between the forms of the body and the couch upon which they lie. But the academicians were outraged, especially because these heresies against academic convention were made by a young man to whom they had already awarded the *Prix de Rome*—for which funds had at last been found.

The Expatriate

With *Madame Rivière* and his other Salon pictures of 1806 labeled "Gothic," "bizarre," and "revolutionary," Ingres left for Rome hurt and confused. He was twenty-six years old; Girodet had not yet painted *The Entombment of Atala,* David was working on *Le Sacre,* Géricault was only fifteen, and Delacroix was a child of eight.

For the next fourteen years Ingres stayed in Rome, and then spent four years in Florence, with a brief excursion to Paris in between. He was thus an expatriate while romanticism announced itself tentatively in *Atala,* made its first sensation with the *Raft of the Medusa,* and found its great man with the exhibition of *Dante and Vergil* in 1822.

Ingres was more than content to stay away. He was as enchanted with Rome as he was disenchanted with Paris. Rather than return, he broke his engagement to a young woman named Anne Marie Julie Forestier, and after another abortive engagement to the daughter of a Danish archeologist he proposed by letter to Madeleine Chappell, a milliner several years older than he and a cousin of one of his

59. Ingres: *Bather of Valpinçon,* 1808. 56⅝ x 38¼". Louvre, Paris. (Photo Giraudon.)

friends in Rome. He had never seen Madeleine, who was in her thirties. She came to Rome and they met, romantically, at the tomb of Nero. The marriage was a success.

During the years in Rome between his arrival and his marriage, the "eccentricities" of Ingres's style had become more and more pronounced, which means that he had continued to develop as an original painter in spite of what he regarded as his loyal adherence to conventional classical disci-

plines. His *Bather of Valpinçon* [59], painted in 1808, could be Ingres's masterpiece if one picture had to be chosen from many eligible ones. It presents the typical Ingres paradox of classical derivations combined with extremely personal and, now, even sensuous responses. Nominally the *Bather of Valpinçon* has the closest classical associations, since the pose of the figure, with the cloth twisted about one arm, is borrowed from the figure of a Nereid on a Roman sarcophagus. But there all resemblance to classical sculpture ends, and although the picture is smoothly painted, with precisely defined contours, these neoclassical elements are superficial. Again, line is the picture, this time not in the complicated patterns of the *Madame Rivière* but in a reduction of the drawing of the nude body to a few subtle, almost eventless contours, suddenly contrasted with the bunched convolutions of the cloth and the turban, all played against the long straight folds of the curtain at the left, briefly echoed at the upper right. Like the contours, the modeling of the body is reduced to an ultimate simplicity and is correspondingly subtle. And a new—and thoroughly un-Davidian—element appears in the painter's sensuous response to the warmth and softness of the naked flesh.

The first series of Roman paintings reaches its climax three years later (1811) in *Jupiter and Thetis* [60, 61]. Ingres's *Prix de Rome* picture had shown Achilles and his loved friend Patroclus being called into Agamemnon's support by his ambassadors. *Jupiter and Thetis* illustrates a climactic episode later in the same story. It is certainly the most bizarre of all Ingres's paintings. The curious distortion of the woman's throat, the indescribable quality of her arms, flowering into tiny hands, the fantastic complications of the drapery falling from her body and disposed in utterly illogical folds and rills, the figure of Jupiter with its gigantic, soft torso and its diminutive face encircled by a black wreath of hair and beard—all these, with all the other curious and meticulous details, pushed just to the point of the grotesque, even to the edge of the repellent, are saved in the end by the assurance of their design and, above all, by the sensation they convey that they are distilled from secret inner experience.

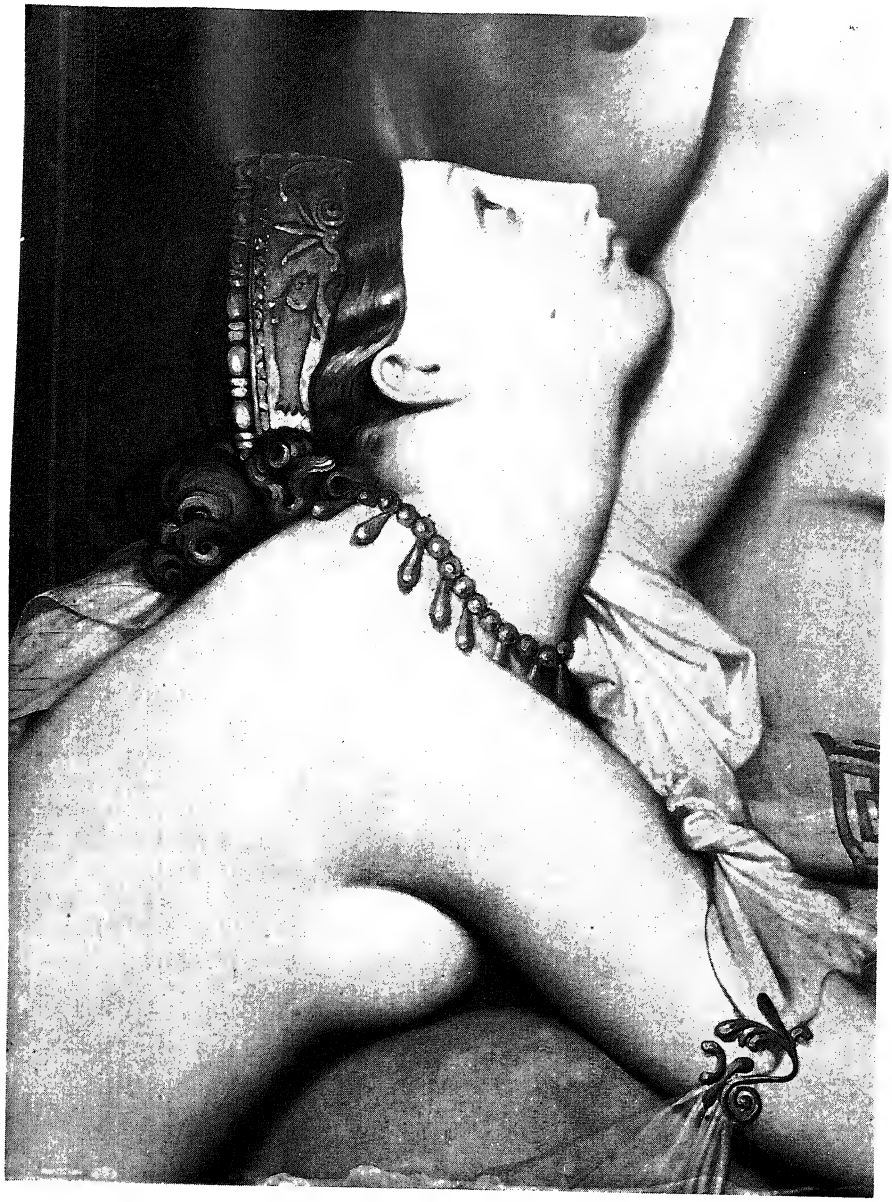
Actually, the picture follows explicitly Homer's account of how Thetis, a sea nymph, begged Jupiter to grant victory to the Trojans, to avenge an insult to her son Achilles. The request is granted in spite of the fact that in granting it, Jupiter must incur the wrath of Juno. The god had once renounced his secret love for Thetis and yielded her to Achilles' father.

In his copy of a French version of the *Iliad*, Ingres marked a passage that especially interested him; a paraphrase may give some idea of how closely he captured the essence of the episode:

"Thetis arose from the waves of the sea, and at the break of day rose through the immensity of the sky to Olympus. There she found him whose eye sees all the universe, the son of Saturn, seated far from the other gods on the highest summit of the mountain. She appeared before him and, with one hand upon his knees and lifting the other to his chin, she implored the monarch. But the god who commands the clouds answered nothing; he remained long in silence. Then this god of thunder let escape from his breast a profound sigh, and said, 'I promise you the satisfaction of your desires, and in pledge I accord you the sign of my sacred head.' Thus he spoke, and knit his black brows; the divine hair stirred upon the immortal head, and vast Olympus trembled, and Thetis, from the height of dazzling Olympus, threw herself again into the depths of the sea."

Yet, in spite of Ingres's close adherence to the text, *Jupiter and Thetis* is not a literary picture, not a mere illustration. It is complete in itself, legitimately and independently a pictorial expression. Even with no literary reference as a guide, the observer cannot but understand the drama of the moment, the nymph's hesitant temerity as she touches the face of the god, the power of the god himself, and the tension as he weighs whatever secrets must determine his response.

Jupiter and Thetis was the last of the paintings Ingres sent back to Paris under the regulation requiring an annual work



60. INGRES: Detail from Figure 61. (Photo Giraudon.)

from a *Prix de Rome* winner, and he kept a special affection for it all his life. It is the most personal of his major works, impregnated as it is with the element that most intimately characterizes Ingres's art, an element regarded dubiously by many people attempting to evaluate him: an obsessive sexuality that defies the mask of classical idealization. Basic to Ingres's conception of his subjects (in all likelihood unconsciously so on Ingres's part), sexuality is present as if by subterfuge. Where an open and virile masculine sensuousness would not be questionable, there is a suggestion of secret sensual revery. A psychiatrist might find it natural that *Jupiter and Thetis* and others of Ingres's early Roman pictures with the same quality were painted while the ar-

61. INGRES: *Jupiter and Thetis,* 1811. 130 x 101". *Musée Granet,* Aix-en-Provence.

tist's personal life was disturbed by his two abortive engagements and the curious circumstances of his courtship of Madeleine Chappell, and equally natural that after his happy marriage in 1813 his painting took a "healthier" direction. But these same pictures can be defended as Ingres's finest work. According to one theory, all creative art is a kind of purification for the artist, and if *Jupiter and Thetis* was abstracted from Ingres's personal emotional confusions then it is a very "modern" picture of a kind frequent in the twentieth century, where the creative act becomes a kind of release and a private confessional for the artist, and the resulting work of art is only incidentally intended for the public, who is free to make of it what it will.

The Troubadour

In Rome Ingres found in Raphael a new idol among the old masters, and for him the fifteenth-century Italian replaced all other official academic deities. Ingres's nature inclined toward gentle grace, which Raphael offered; at the same time Raphael was acceptable to an avowed classicist because his derivations from classical antiquity were quite direct. But Raphael's influence on Ingres was not altogether for the best and is an element in a not very happy footnote to his total work: his troubadour pictures.

Troubadour painting was a school within a school, and although it flourished under painters who had been trained by David, classical subjects were abandoned for historical anecdotes of the middle ages and the Renaissance. Ingres, their contemporary, painted troubadour subjects when these men were having their first success, combining this kind of picture with the ones we have just seen. His troubadour subjects included a *Betrothal of Raphael,* painted in 1812, no doubt more than coincidentally the year of his own second betrothal, and *Raphael and La Fornarina.* These were the only two pictures Ingres completed in a projected series covering the life of his new idol. He repeated the second subject many times, finally with a variation as late as 1860, of which he wrote, "I hope it will cause all the others to be forgotten." He also made repeated versions of *Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini* [62]. Other subjects were *Henry IV Playing with His Children While the Spanish Ambassador Is Being Admitted, King Philip of Spain Investing the Marshal of Berwick with the Golden Fleece, The Death of Leonardo da Vinci in the Arms of Francis I,* and *Aretino in the Studio of Tintoretto.* These labored storytelling pictures seem a waste of Ingres's meticulous technique. Except for the two Raphael subjects and the *Paolo and Francesca* they hardly suggest his linear beauties.

It was specifically the vogue for troubadour painting that inspired David's complaint in 1808 that the direction he had set for the fine arts was too severe to please for very long in France. "In ten years the study of the antique will be abandoned," he said. "I hear the antique praised on every side but when I try to find it applied, I discover that it never is. All these gods, all the heroes, will be replaced by chevaliers, by troubadours singing beneath the windows of their lady-loves, at the foot of medieval towers." The invasion of Olympus by troubadours was another of the many indications that the romantic spirit was inherent in the thought and feeling of the early nineteenth century. The troubadour subject was natural to romanticism and was much used in romantic treatments by romantic painters and dramatists, and troubadour pictures were also among the ancestors of the acres of history pictures covering Salon walls later on. As far as Ingres was concerned, the subjects offered him nothing, nor did he have anything to bring them. And there is much of their dryness in the important but essentially dull *Vow of Louis XIII.*

62. INGRES: *Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini, c.* 1814. Panel, 13¾ x 11". *Musée Condé,* Chantilly.

63. INGRES: *The Vow of Louis XIII,* 1824. (Upper portion, width 103".) Cathedral, Montauban.

64. INGRES: *Apotheosis of Homer,* 1827. 152 x 203". Louvre, Paris.

The Prodigal

But whatever its faults, *The Vow of Louis XIII* [63] was a success with everyone. After its triumphant exhibition in the Salon of 1824, the classicists, relieved to have found a new leader, welcomed the *Vow* as his inaugural address, and the romantics, including Delacroix, were glad to see the end of the Davidian formula. The classicists' approval was an about-face; they had consistently attacked Ingres's Salon pictures. Cries of "Gothic" had resounded again in 1819. By some extraordinary feats of critical gymnastics invoking as a bad example the Italian primitive master Cimabue, the academicians had managed to make the same objections to the simplicity of Ingres's Roman painting* that they had made to the complications of *Madame Rivière.*

The Vow of Louis XIII was acceptable to the academicians because it was a thoroughly derivative picture. Ingres received the commission for it in the first place on the strength of a painting of *Christ Delivering the Keys to St. Peter,* which he had completed in 1820 for the Church of San Trinità dei Monti in Rome, a lamentable picture, a pasting together, to the point of plagiarism, of elements from Raphael. *The Vow of Louis XIII,* while it remains a greatly respected work today, is really not much better on that score, although the pasted-together ensemble is more agreeable. But for the academicians this fault was a virtue. They were willing to accept the renegade who had returned to the fold with a large imitation of a certified old master. They forgave the original excesses of his youth.

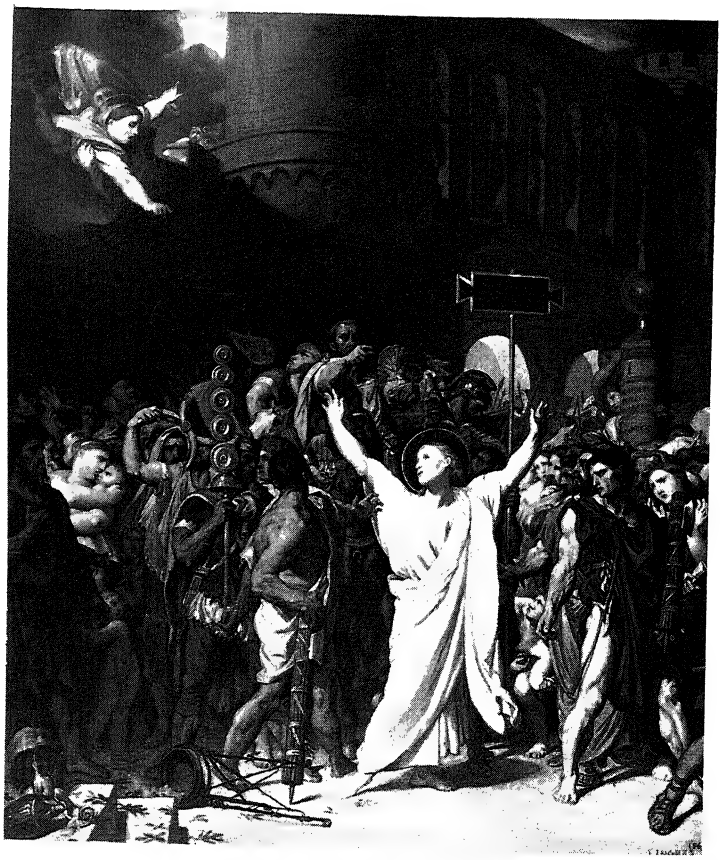
Delighted to return, Ingres remained in Pairs for ten years. He received one official award after another and was named President of the *École des Beaux Arts,* the official school. He taught the academic recipes to as many as a hundred students at a time, enforcing classical dogma relentlessly (teaching beauty as one teaches arithmetic, Delacroix said), and he was even success-

* Specifically, the objections centered on a reclining nude, the *Grande Odalisque,* now in the Louvre. See [89].

ful now and then in reducing his own art to dry conformity. His major commission of the period, the *Apotheosis of Homer* [64], is an exquisitely studied demonstration of the classical rules, the picture every *Prix de Rome* contestant would have painted if he could have.

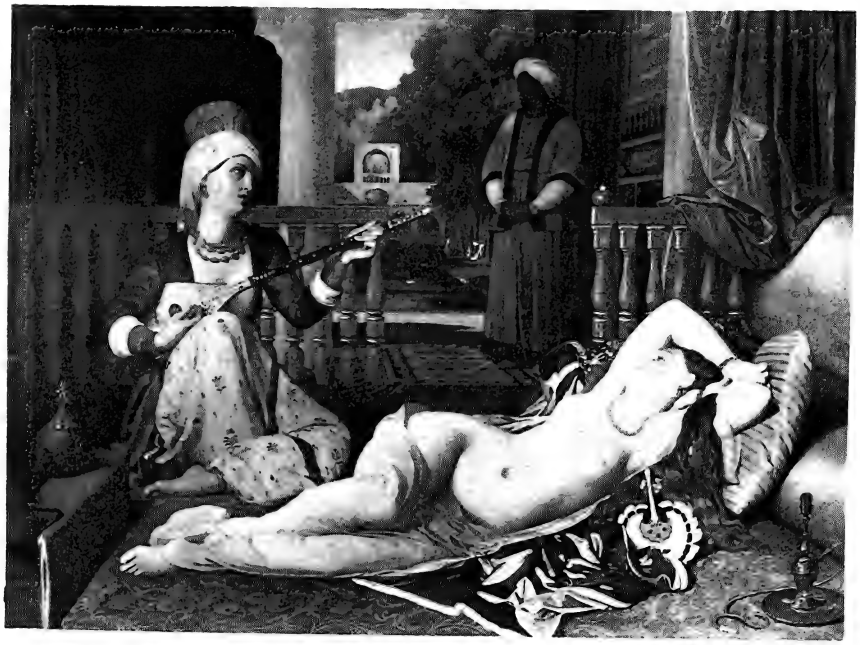
But the accord between Ingres and the world of academic success was not quite as warm as it appeared to be. He had grown increasingly irascible, and when another large religious picture, *The Martyrdom of St. Symphorien* [65], received a bad reception in the Salon of 1834, Ingres asked to be transferred back to Rome as Director of the Academy there. He was given the appointment and left again for Italy in much the same frame of mind as before. He refused all commissions, forbade henceforth the showing of any of his pictures in the Salon, and painted, among others, two pictures in which the spirit of his early Roman work is recalled with renewed and extraordinary intensity.

In both of these a languorous sexuality is expressed in forms of brilliant precision, a contrast that comes close to being jolting in one of them, the vividly tinted *Odalisque with the Slave* [66]. The other, *Stratonice* [67] repeats the subject with which David had won the *Prix de Rome* long before [5] and in spirit recalls Ingres's own *Jupiter and Thetis*. Within an elaborate Greek interior, where every mosaic, every vein of marble, every smallest detail of carved ornament, every implausible fold of drapery, is rendered with the microscopic intensity of a revelation, a dream, or a vision, the figures in the drama of repressed passion are transfixed in attitudes of extreme artificiality. Like *Jupiter and Thetis*, *Stratonice* is saved from mawkishness or absurdity by qualities that may be sensed but are not easy to explain. They have to do with the consistency of the vision, where each of a multitude of details is conceived in harmony with all the others, and conception is totally integrated with execution. It is possible to be puzzled by this conception or to be unsympathetic to it, but it is impossible not to feel that every form, every line, and every relationship of the painted images are expressions of emotional convictions passionately held by the artist who created them.



65. INGRES: *The Martyrdom of St. Symphorien*, 1865. 14⅛ x 12¼". Reduced replica with minor variations from the picture for the Cathedral of Autun, 1834. Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.

Ingres completed these two pictures, after interruptions, in 1840. He was sixty years old. The following year, in bad health, he returned to Paris. The prodigal's second homecoming was triumphant with official receptions and awards. He began work on two mural commissions, *The Golden Age* and *The Age of Iron*. The first was never finished and the second was only sketched in. The fragments are not impressive. Possibly Ingres might have reached some conclusion to the struggle between sensuous forms, academic doctrine, and elaborated allegory that tears them apart, but in their present state they are like battlegrounds abandoned in fatigue.



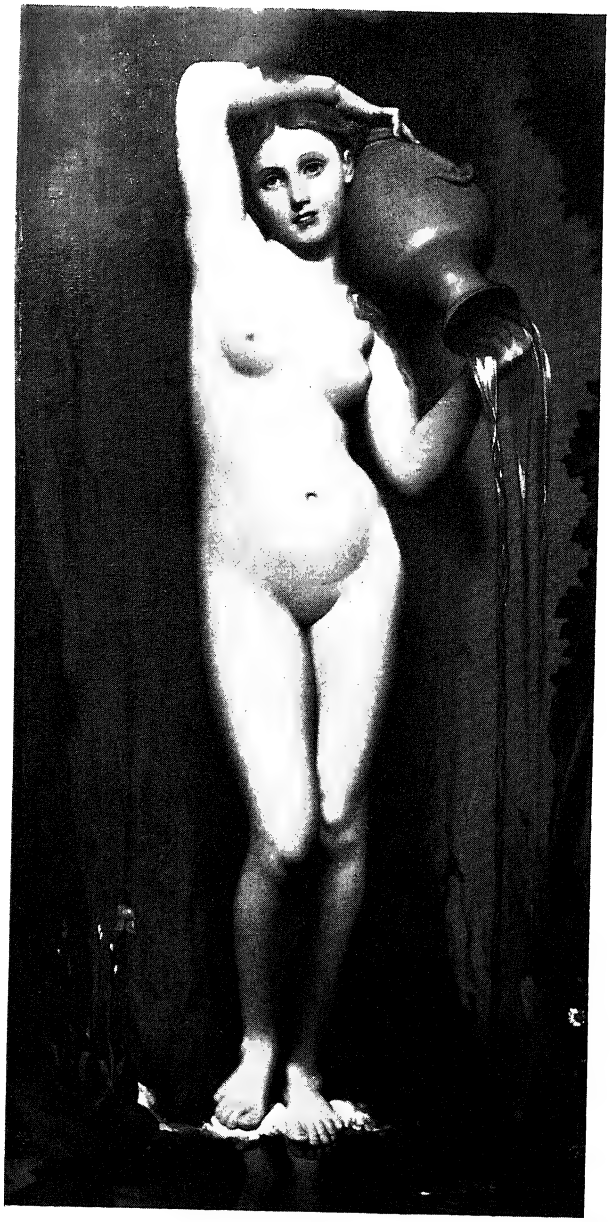
66. INGRES: *Odalisque with the Slave,* 1842. 28 x 39⅜". Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

67. INGRES: *Stratonice,* 1866. 24 x 36¼". *Musée Fabre,* Montpellier. Variation on version of 1840. *Musée Condé,* Chantilly. (Photo Giraudon.)

In 1849 Madeleine Chappell died. The marriage that had begun with such an extraordinary courtship had been an ideal one, and Ingres was inconsolable until three years later when he yielded to the urging of friends and remarried, at seventy-one. In 1855 he was induced to relent in his determination never to exhibit again in the Salon, and like Delacroix in that year he had a gallery to himself for a retrospective collection. There were further honors at home—he was even named a senator in 1862—and his renown became international with honorary membership in the academies of other countries. When he died in 1867 he was eighty-six years old. He had outlived Delacroix, although classicism had not.

Two pictures from these last years enjoy somewhat inflated reputations. In 1820 Ingres had begun work on a standing female nude, *La Source* [68]. Now, thirty-six years later, he completed it with the help of pupils. The figure with its softened contours and cottony flesh is a superior academic studio piece, but it is a very poor second to the two great Roman nudes, the *Bather of Valpinçon* and the *Grande Odalisque*. The face, a symmetrical mask on the classical formula, has grown vapid. By most standards *La Source* is a fine picture, but not by the standard of Ingres at his greatest.

In 1862 (according to the date on the picture) or 1863 (according to a letter in which he mentions it) Ingres completed *The Turkish Bath* [69], a recombination of figures from several pictures painted in different periods. The Bather of Valpinçon, now playing a mandolin, dominates a confused arrangement of some twenty-five naked and ill-assorted harem women, ranging downward from the Bather's undiminished loveliness to the almost comical vulgarity of the squirming masses of flesh in the background. One conspicuous head, just behind the upraised arm of the reclining figure in the right foreground, with its cheek against the ear of the adjoining figure, is wedged into the composition in such a way that it would be physically impossible for a body to exist normally attached to it. *The Turkish Bath* had a difficult history, explaining some of its defects.



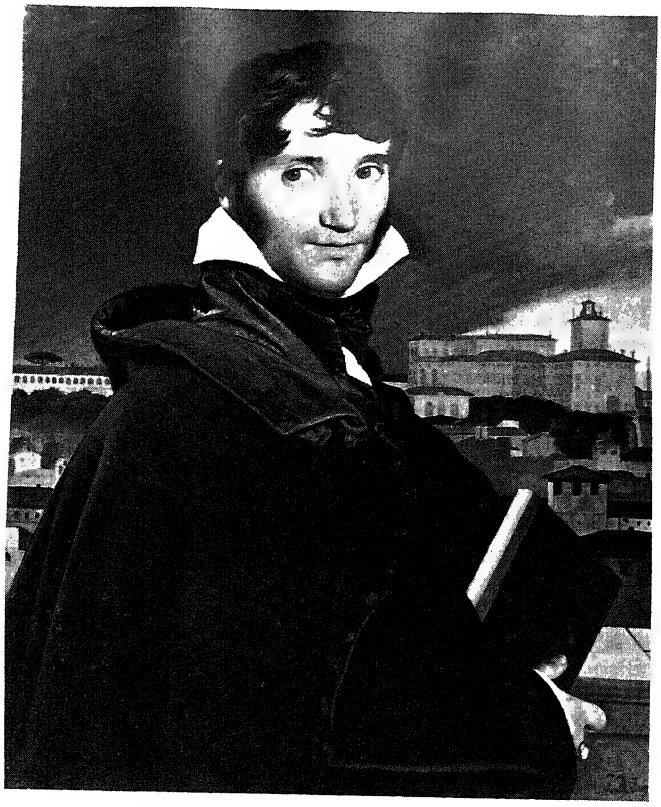
68. INGRES: *La Source*, 1820–56. 64½ x 32¼". Louvre, Paris. (Photo Giraudon.)

Ingres completed it about 1852 as a rectangular composition, then reworked it several times, once after it had been returned by a purchaser, and finally changed its shape to the present circular one, with necessary additions and subtractions. He was eighty-three by the time he made this final revision.

69. INGRES: *The Turkish Bath, c.* 1852–63. Diameter 42½". Louvre, Paris.

Portraits and Drawings

As a portraitist Ingres was so prolific and worked so frequently at his highest level that it is difficult to eliminate dozens of superb pictures in order to select a representative few. The early "Gothic" portrait of *Madame Rivière* has already been considered. In comparison with it, the portrait of his friend the painter *François Marius Granet* [70] is more restrained, not only because the subject is a man but because Ingres has come under new influences. He never repeated the complexity of linear flow that marked *Madame Rivière,* either because of the criticisms of it or because in Italy he discovered the portraits of the Italian Renaissance and was attracted by their greater simplicity—or, of course, because of both. In the portrait of Granet, the head surmounts a generally pyramidal mass and is lifted above the distant horizon in order to play its lines and shapes against an eventless passage of sky. The strongest value contrasts, the white collar and the dark hair, frame the face as a further assurance that it will remain the undisputed focal point of the composition. The architectural landscape background is full of interest, but since it is reduced to small scale in the distance it emphasizes the largeness of the figure to lend it additional importance.



70. INGRES: *François Marius Granet.* Date unknown. 28¾ x 24". Museum, Aix-en-Provence.

71. INGRES: *Comtesse d'Haussonville,* 1845. 53½ x 36¼". Copyright The Frick Collection, N.Y.

These are all standard Renaissance devices worn threadbare in the work of any number of painters who used them in very much the way Ingres did; they are not difficult to employ skillfully. Ingres's *Granet* is a masterpiece because over this conventional framework he builds his own linear pattern, combining the sinuosities of the edges of the open cape and its thrown-back collar with the contrasting solidity of its general silhouette; contrasting equally the unqualified rectangularities of the book, the bit of wall, and the buildings in the background, with the irregular shapes of the white collar, the head, and the locks of hair patterned against the forehead. All the forms have more mass, more solidity, and are more naturalistic than those of the *Madame Rivière,* but they are still drawn in linear arabesques that have their own abstract beauty. And in both portraits the sensuousness of Ingres's response to human beauty warms and illuminates these images presented with such precision and control.

The background of the *Granet* is a specific reference to place. It shows the Villa Medici, the Renaissance palace acquired by the French Academy as its Roman base. With its gardens, its fantasy of a façade, its sculpture, its great halls, its towering position on the most beautiful of the Roman hills, looking across the most spectacular panorama of the city, the Villa Medici was a paradise for the *Prix de Rome* winners, who lived and painted there (and still do). Like Ingres, Granet was a *Prix de Rome* man. (For a while he enjoyed a success in Paris, although his work is forgotten today—which is a mercy.) Ingres's portrait of him hangs in the municipal museum in his home city of Aix-en-Provence. A few feet away *Jupiter and Thetis* covers the end

72. INGRES: *Comtesse de Tournon,* 1814. 36⅝ x 28¾". Collection Henry P. McIlhenny, Philadelphia.

wall of the gallery, a combination evoking Ingres's young manhood in Rome.

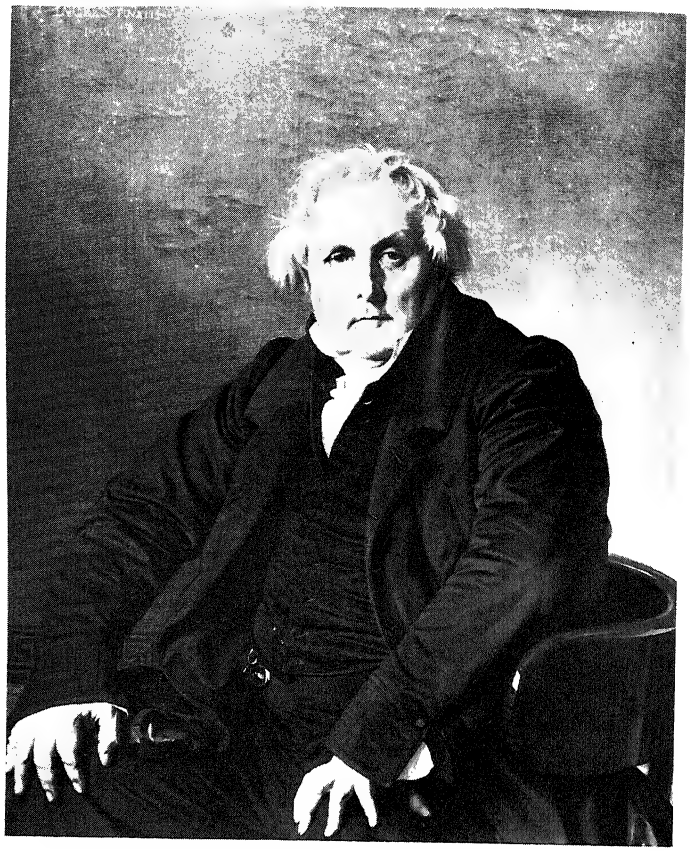
The general formula of the *Granet* served Ingres for many of his finest early portraits. In later ones, such as that of the young *Comtesse d'Haussonville* [71], done in 1845, he shows greater dependence on accessory details for their inherent interest as objects, more complication for the sake of stunning naturalistic rendering (in the stuff of the dress, for instance) at the expense of linear invention. Toward the end this tendency dominated the painter to the point where a portrait is in danger of holding more interest as a contemporary record of an interior and a lady's toilette than as a transmutation of fact into art. But Ingres never entirely succeeded in his effort to be anything but himself. Ingres the academician never quite managed to stifle Ingres the original artist.

Ingres had one great limitation as a portrait painter, if one demands that a portrait be not only a fine painting but an interpretation of character. In his average portrait whatever we learn of the sitter's character we must infer by association. Sometimes these associations are strong. The early

(1812) portrait of the *Comtesse de Tournon* [72] presents one vivid individual among Ingres's gallery of somewhat repetitious and superficially explored personalities. Yet even in this case we may feel that the old Countess was a person of such sprightly character and such characterizing features that some reflection of her individuality was inevitable in anything like an accurate reproduction of her appearance. Here the sitter seems to have imposed her personality upon the painter, where ordinarily when Ingres painted a portrait it was the other way around.

The great exception among all Ingres portraits is the one of *Monsieur Bertin* [73], the founder and director of *Le Journal des Débats*. Here it is obvious that Ingres was seeking something beyond a satisfactory "likeness" or an elegant effigy. The selection of pose, the tension in the position of the hands on the knees as the man leans forward slightly, the elimination of accessory detail, the sharp, decisive patterning of the hair—which in a preliminary drawing is shown to have been, actually, rather limp and characterless—all contribute to the impression of shrewdness and energy that would not have been present in a simple transcription of the subject's appearance as he sat patiently for the artist.

A drawing by Ingres is of such delicacy that it is brutalized in even the best reproduction. He drew constantly and made innumerable preliminary studies for his paintings. The *Musée Ingres* in his native city of Montauban is the great treasure house of these studies, but hundreds of Ingres drawings are in museums and collections elsewhere. These include especially the small portrait sketches in pencil made sometimes as preliminary studies, or often as a souvenir given in affection or in an effort at ingratiation to the aristocrats who came through Rome in steady streams. One of these is the *Comte Turpin de Crissé* [74], with the head typically modeled in more detail than the figure, which is sketched in with absolute assurance but with only an occasional light indication of shadow to enhance the form, which is otherwise revealed entirely by line. Ingres frequently catches a stronger suggestion of personality in these



73. INGRES: *Monsieur Bertin*, 1832. 45¾ x 37⅜". Louvre, Paris.

drawings than he tries for in more carefully studied paintings. Jaunty elegance, alert, sophisticated intelligence, social aplomb, and even a hint of amused cynicism are presented in the features and the pose as Ingres has transcribed them quickly here with the model before him. If Ingres seldom reflects his sitter's individuality with equal brilliance in his paintings, it is because his immediate response to a subject, which was instinctively perceptive, was not ordinarily increased and deepened by further reflection; rather it was lessened by further study of the portrait as a problem in design. If this is a limitation it must be accepted as one playing its own part, not necessarily negative, in Ingres's creation of some of the most extraordinarily effective portraits in the European tradition.

In his portraits Ingres is a great stylist; so is he, of course, in his subject pictures. But he must remain only a stylist, nothing more,

74. INGRES: *Comte Turpin de Crissé,* probably 1818. Pencil on white paper. 11⅝ x 8⅞". Collection Walter C. Baker, New York.

even in such pictures as *Jupiter and Thetis,* unless his characterizing element of hidden and even unconscious personal emotional expression is recognized. Baudelaire, who was so perceptive of the universal significance of the conceptions released through Delacroix's romantic forms, searched uneasily in the art of Ingres for meanings he seems to have suspected were concealed beneath the polished surface and fettered within the implacable contours of Ingres's style. He never convinced himself that these meanings were there. But the twentieth century, with its exploration of the hidden impulses of the creative act, has revealed Ingres as an intense, intimate, and even secret artist of the most personal kind beneath his stylizations and pedantry.

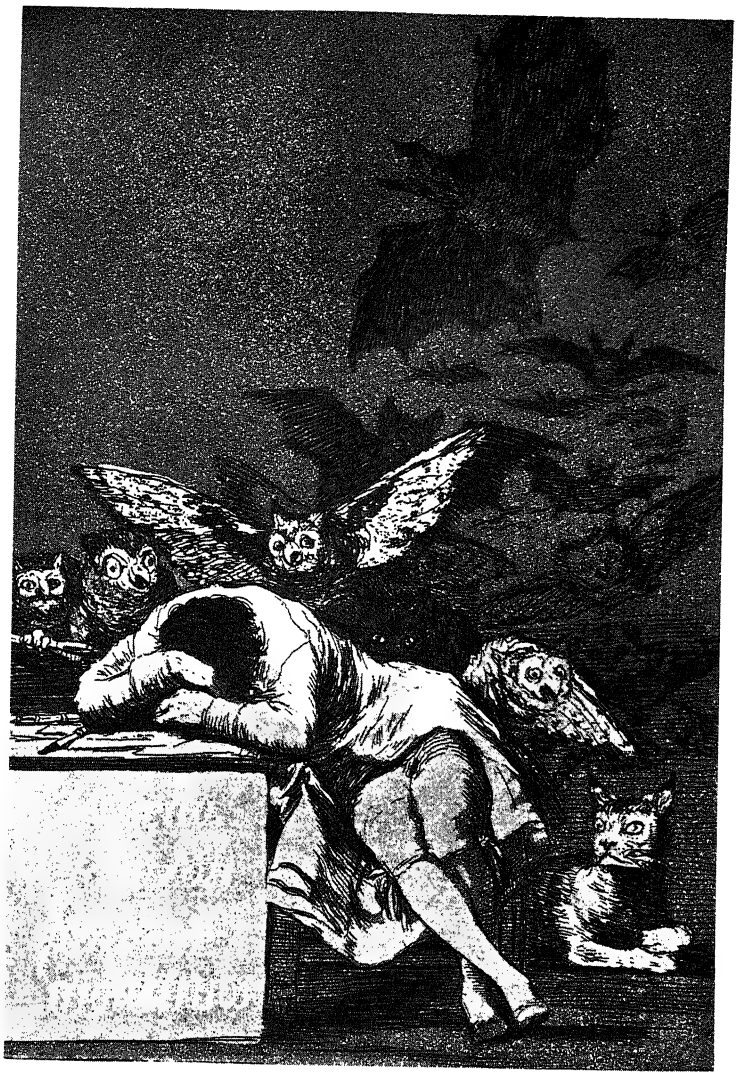
CHAPTER 4

Realism

Idealism and Disillusion

For all their differences, the classicists and the romantics held one conviction in common, and it was a basic one: they thought of life and the world as a mystery that could be explored to discover the reason for man's existence. Neither doubted the assumption that we are here for a reason and that our being is justified and meaningful. For both, nature—all the different facets of life, of the world—was what Delacroix called "a vocabulary" that could be used to study the mystery's solution. Classic or romantic, the idealist assumes that within all the conflicts and contradictions, all the ambiguities and confusions of life, somewhere there is a harmony, a discoverable truth, by which man can understand the fact that he exists. The forces around him and within him, all apparently working at odds against one another, must certainly be not accidental, as they appear to be, but animated toward meaningful order; must certainly be some part of a universal plan within which we move for some purpose toward some reward, some profound satisfaction of the human yearning to be more than an organism that is born, suffers, and dies.

The classicist sought to clarify the mystery by intellectualizing man's experience. The romantic sought its heart in the more ambiguous area of the "soul" and was willing to cultivate even life's suffering in the conviction that emotional experience holds the answer everyone seeks. But in the end —and this is the important point—both classicist and romantic were idealists, refusing to accept the world at face value, rejecting it in the end, forcing the experience of life into their respective and equally arbitrary molds in spite of repeated evidence



75. Goya: *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, 1797–98. Etching and aquatint, 8⅜ x 5⅞". From the *Caprichos*. Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Smith, Kline and French Laboratories.

that they could never get more than a part of it to fit.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, twenty-five years after David's death and a decade before Delacroix's and Ingres's, painters were becoming disillusioned with idealism in either form and were turning to realism, which in several forms was to dominate painting until near the end of the century. Meanwhile, the movement had been anticipated by one of the most unillusioned painters who ever lived, the Spaniard Francisco Goya (1746–1828).

Goya: His World

Goya was a contemporary of David almost to the exact years, having been born two years earlier than the master of classicism and dying three years after him. Yet as a young man he discarded the classicism of his teachers, and he was never affected by the type of romanticism that developed in France. In his very old age Goya visited Paris and is said to have admired the work of the young Delacroix. But he could have told himself that the vehemence of his own work—its emotional color and its dramatic force—not only exceeded that of this Frenchman who was fifty-three years younger but that his, Goya's, art was born from a fervent experience of life that gave it a vitality alongside which Delacroix's romanticism was a theoretical demonstration.

Because of his fire and his dramatic vigor, Goya is often called a romantic painter. Because he deals so frequently with horrors and with the fantastic, he may appear to be a painter of the world of imaginative emotionalism inhabited by one type of romantic. But Goya was a realist because he saw the world without illusion. No other painter has seen it more naked of saving grace, either of reason or of sentiment, of intellect or of soul. Even when his visions are most monstrous, even when he is most outraged by what he sees and records it most violently, Goya is a realist in the basic sense: he sees the world around him for what it is and he accepts its existence as unalterable fact. The world Goya saw was not a world he could condone; but neither did he hope to change it or to discover hidden within it the classicist's order or the romantic's yearning conviction of some ultimate, if undecipherable, meaning.

The circumstances surrounding Goya in his daily life as a Spaniard offered no nourishment for idealism of any kind. While David was synthesizing an art in praise of Reason, stimulated by the French philosophers who had deified it, Goya was working at the court of Spain, surrounded by a group of human monsters who have never been surpassed for stupidity, viciousness, ignorance, greed, and corruption, in a coun-

try intellectually all but inert, with a populace brutalized by poverty, bigotry, and oppression. The national characteristics of Spain included a catalogue of all evil and misery, and Goya's observation of the world gave him no reason to believe that the eighteenth-century philosophers' dream of Reason had produced anything more than monsters. He said as much in a print showing a student asleep over his books while the air around him is filled with screech owls and bats [75]. The print has been given various interpretations, but any interpretation must accept its premise of the triumph of nightmare. Man's incapacity to think his way toward reasonable and humane existence is parabled in another print [76] in which a philosopher or teacher mouths by rote the phrases of learning to an audience deaf, dumb, and blind to thought of any kind, the whole scene taking place upon a branch so rotten that it will presently drop everyone into an abyss of which they are not even aware.

The wonder is that from such a world a man like Goya managed to emerge at all. To his common origin he owed his physical vigor and, for that matter, his intellectual vigor, which would have been stultified and corrupted if he had grown up in the world he entered later. To this world, the world of his patrons, the court and the circles surrounding it, he owed his living, the opportunity to paint, and thus eventually his fame, but he never conceded a point in his contempt for it. Goya was incapable of the kind of flattery exercised by David when he painted Napoleon's disintegrating empress as a mere slip of a girl in *Le Sacre*. Fortunately, flattery was never required of him. His portraits of the royal family are explicitly of abominable, contemptible, mediocre, or at best pathetic characters. That these portraits were accepted and that he was commissioned to repeat them is proof enough that the sitters were as stupid as he painted them to be, so satisfied with themselves that they admired their own images without seeing the ghastly revelation beneath the painted reflections.

The Family of Charles IV [77] shows a group of pompous freaks, swathed in velvets and silks and dripping with jewels. It

76. Goya: *Ridiculous Folly*, 1813–20. Etching and aquatint. 9½ x 13¾". From the *Disparates*. Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. R. Sturgis Ingersoll.

has been nicknamed once and for all "the grocer and his family who have just won the Grand Lottery," a witticism hard on grocers and their families but charitable to the King of Spain and his. The monarch stands in the foreground on the right, his chest and belly ablaze with decorations. A glance is enough to substantiate the story that during the day he would ask his minister, a villain named Manuel Godoy, "how things were going" and without waiting for an answer would consider his obligations as ruler of a nation completed for another twenty-four hours. His grotesque queen stands in the center, embracing her daughter and holding the hand of her son awkwardly enough to suggest that these maternal gestures were unfamiliar ones for her. These children are presumed to have been fathered by the same Manuel Godoy, whose duties at court extended beyond the usual ministerial ones. This queen, Maria Luisa of Parma, also granted her favors to an occasional servant. There have been more vicious women in history, but they were women of greater intelligence and hence capable of greater inventiveness than this one. To the left foreground is Ferdinand, heir to the throne, who is a blank. Behind him is the face of a witch, the King's sister. Only the young couple at the

77. GOYA: *The Family of Charles IV*, 1800. 110 x 132". Prado, Madrid. (Photo Anderson.)

extreme right seem normal. Goya has sympathetically concealed the spinal deformity with which this one of the King's children was born, translating it into a posture twisted because she carries her child in her arms. Her young husband is also a human being. But the children on each side of the Queen are devoid of innocence. The hard-faced little boy is like his father—not the King—and the girl is already an echo of her mother. Behind this collection, almost obscured in deep shadow, at the far left, Goya is at work on the picture.

In Goya's art his contempt for the men around him widens to become a horror of mankind. In his portraits of children he comes closest to relenting, yet even here, as in the *Don Manuel Osorio de Zuñiga* [78], he may see purity and innocence as nothing but fodder for corruption. From the shadows behind the utterly charming image of the little boy gleam the eyes of cats in wait to devour the fragile bird. Goya's young women are creatures of fire and beauty, but without tenderness, and he is fond of playing them in front of figures of frightful old hags. On the surface this contrast reminds us that youth and beauty are transient, but it is even more emphatically a statement that the human spirit is not only subject to

78. Goya: *Don Manuel Osorio de Zuñiga, c.* 1787. 50 x 40". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Jules S. Bache Collection.

79. Goya: *Que Tal?, c.* 1801. 71¼ x 48½". *Palais des Beaux Arts,* Lille.

corruption but apparently, to Goya's way of thinking, impotent to withstand it. *Que Tal?* [79] tells us that time does not ripen humanity into wisdom, but rots and withers it into foolishness and evil.

For Goya, evil is the ultimate reality, violation and degradation are man's fate. He never condones these truths, holding them to be self-evident, but he hardly protests against them. He states vehemently that they are abominable, but he never suggests the possibility of amelioration or correction. *And Nothing Can Be Done about It* is the title of another of his prints [80], one from a series making up as horrifying a record of cruelty as has ever been set down in any medium: Goya's *Disasters of War.*

Between 1808 and 1814 Goya witnessed the Napoleonic invasions of Spain, the guerrilla warfare that followed them, the famine of 1812 that was one result of them, and the return of the Inquisition under Ferdinand VII. Even granting the different viewpoints of a Frenchman and a Spaniard on the subject of Napoleon, we must recognize that the contrast between the treatment of the Napoleonic legend in French painting and Goya's observation of terrible fact is a legitimate, if extreme, example of the difference between romantic or classical idealism and realism. There is no glory in Goya's war, no grandeur in victory or grand emotion in defeat; there are only rape, slaughter, and mutilation. His subject is human bestiality. The victims get second billing to the rapists, butchers, and mutilators; we are appalled by the perpetrators but not led to great compassion for the vic-

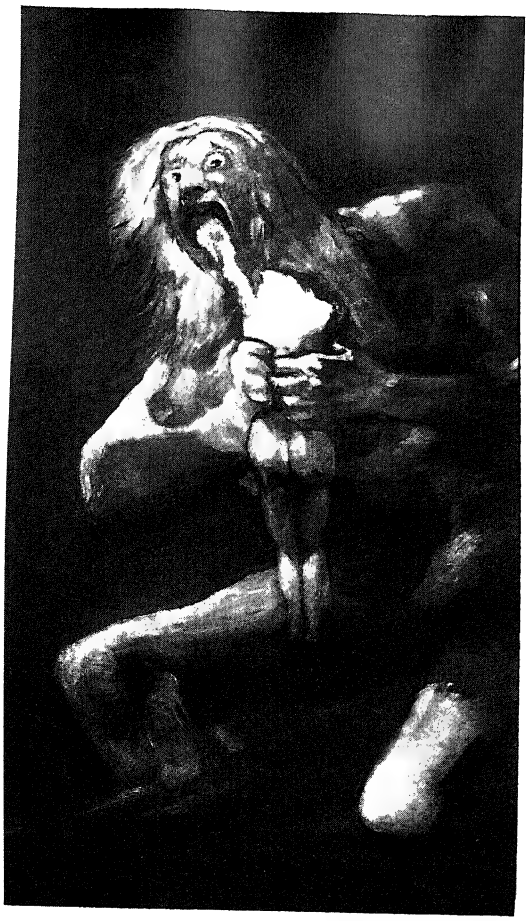
80. Goya: *And Nothing Can Be Done about It* (*Y no hai remedio*), 1810–20. Etching and aquatint, 15½ x 16⅝". Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Smith, Kline and French Laboratories.

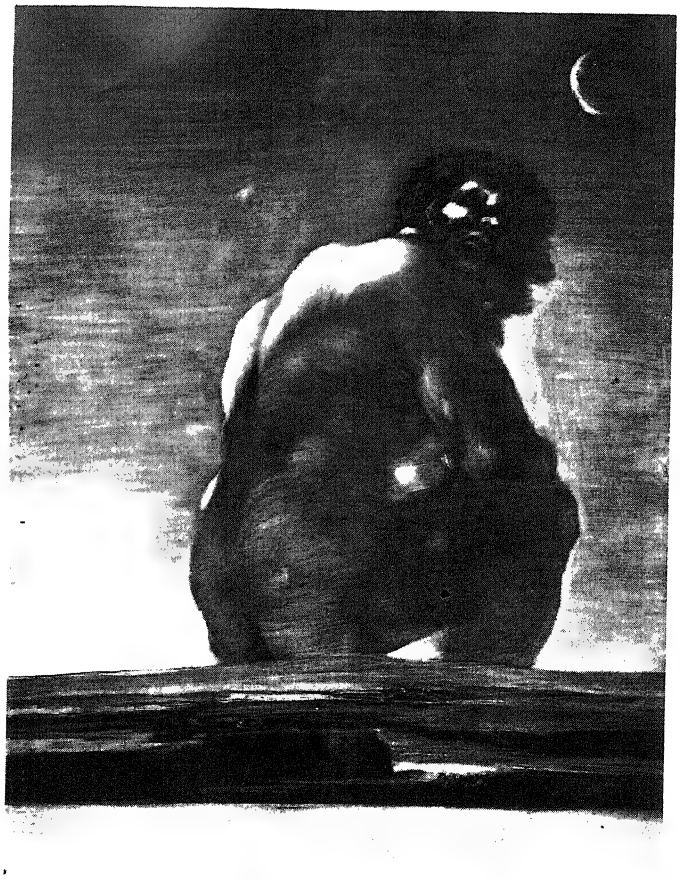
tims, whose agony, no matter how frightful, we must accept as a human condition beyond correction. Gros's *Pesthouse at Jaffa* [33] is by comparison an Elysium.

In such a world reality is close to nightmare, and if we have called Goya a realist we must also say that he created some of the most fantastic visions in the history of art. *The Disasters of War* are realistic in fact and in representation, lamentable as it may be that the world offers material for this realism. The set of prints called the *Caprichos* are fantasies, yet their comments on greed, superstition, stupidity, bigotry, avarice, and indifference are comments on man as a social being with responsibilities for which he is accountable, a concept that is fundamental in realistic art. The *Caprichos* are social comment made in terms of the grotesque, the monstrous, and the hallucinatory. In some of Goya's work, the hallucination passes beyond such comment and becomes a symbolical damnation of humanity, as in the ghastly *Saturn Devouring His Sons* [81]. These morbidities are Goya's answer to the romantic dream of noble passions, and instead of the classicists' Olympians he shows a terrifying *Colossus* [82] dwarfing the world, a magnificent and brutish figure who dominates the universe yet looks upon it without comprehension.

Goya: His Isolation

Some of the most trenchant observations of human vanity and corruption have been made by painters or writers who have moved freely within a specific world, and have been accepted as part of it by its denizens, while within themselves they have remained separated from it by some isolating circumstance. These men remain free to observe with the objectivity of an outsider, yet with intimate access to their material. Goya was such a man. As the





81. Goya: *Saturn Devouring His Sons,* date unknown. 57½ x 32½". Prado, Madrid. (Photo Anderson.)

82. Goya: *Colossus, c.* 1818. Etching and aquatint, scraped, 11⅜ x 8¼". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

official painter of the court he was intimately associated with the aristocratic world. His mistress was the Duchess of Alba, supposed to be the most beautiful woman in Spain and by all accounts so entrancing that she is forgiven much that would be held against a plainer woman. This was a real love affair, and in spite of the Duchess's high station, it was not so much a part of Goya's participation in the world of wealth and position as it was a continuation of his youth as a hard-working and hard-living painter in Madrid's world of brawls and the bull ring. Goya himself was an amateur bullfighter and, by legend, a good one. Later he did a series of etchings, the *Tauromachia,* on this sport or art. Here, as in his paintings of the life of the city, its strollers, its beggars, its people of the streets, he is established historically as a realist finding material in the life around him and commenting on it in contemporary terms, without reference to ancient gods and heroes or exotic or picturesque places or customs. (If the city life he painted has an exotic flavor for us, it did not for him.)

Goya's withdrawal from this life—from life in general, for that matter—a spiritual withdrawal that left him a figure moving actively among people yet observing them from seclusion, was the result of a desperate

83. Goya: *Portrait of His Wife, Josefa Bayeu, c.* 1798. 32 x 22". Prado, Madrid. (Photo Anderson.)

illness that left him totally deaf upon his recovery in 1793, at the age of forty-six. Whatever elements in his temperament that had predisposed him to the contemplation of human folly were now exaggerated; the isolation of deafness also coincided with his rise in official favor and his increasing contact with the world of the court.*

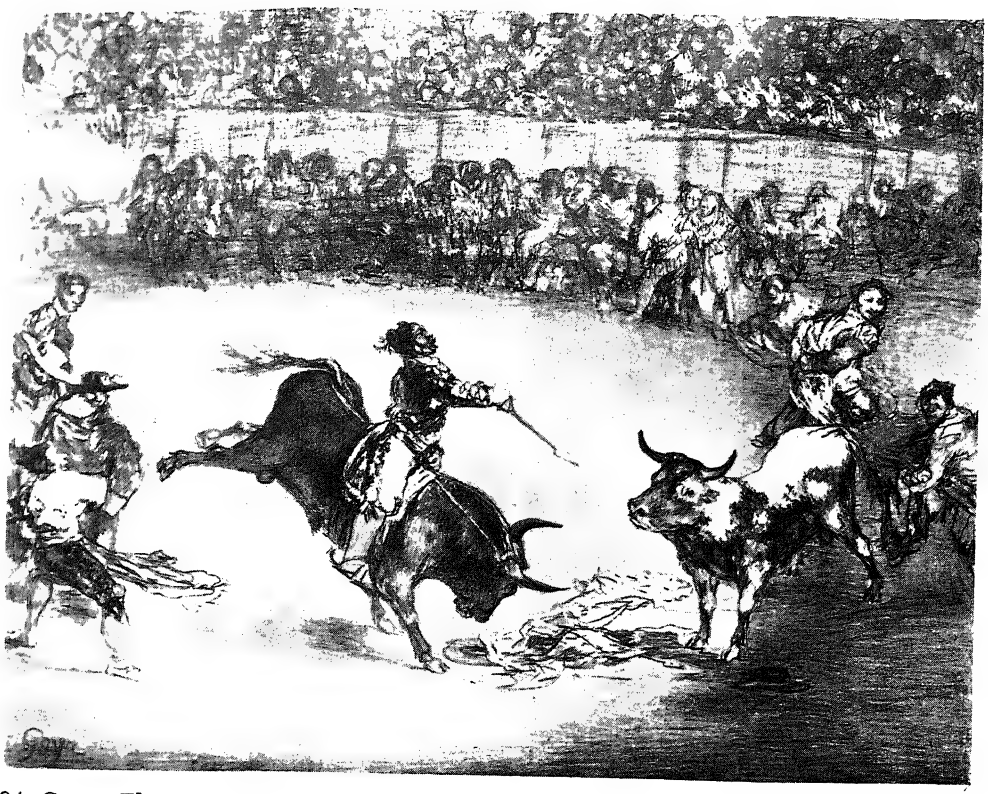
* Goya had become a court painter under Charles III in 1786 and was raised to *pintor de cámara* in 1789 by Charles IV, at about which time he seems to have studied the liberal ideas of the French encyclopedists, who were popular with Spanish intellectuals. This period of relative optimism was terminated by his illness in 1792 with convalescence and deafness in 1793. He became president of Spain's Royal Academy in 1795 and First Painter to the King in 1799.

The first years of deafness and isolation produced the *Caprichos,* a set of eighty aquatints† first announced to the public in 1797 and published two years later. *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* [75] was its first plate and its theme. In the *Caprichos* unreasonable man defeats himself and tortures his fellows with every cruelty, indignity, and foolishness; the pattern of Goya's pessimism is set, and from this time on, circumstances continue to increase his paradoxical combination of vehemence and detachment. In 1802 the Duchess of Alba died. Goya was fifty-six years old. He witnessed the Napoleonic invasions and the uprisings in Madrid before the death of his wife ten years after that of his duchess. He had been married for thirty-six years to Josefa Bayeu, the sister of a painter with whom he had an early association. She was a devoted and loyal woman who bore him twenty children, some of whom lived; he painted a very sympathetic portrait of her [83].

Goya was now so cut off from human contact and so embittered that he left Madrid to go into seclusion in his country house, *La Quinta del Sordo* (Deaf Man's Villa). This was about 1814; he was sixty-eight but a man of astounding vigor. He etched the *Tauromachia,* a set of forty large plates telling the history of the bullfight and its heroes, and by 1819, at seventy-three, he had produced another set of twenty-two etchings and aquatints, the *Disparates,* and completed *The Disasters of War,* although for political reasons these latter were not published until 1863, long after his death.

The *Disparates* are the most fantastic of Goya's prints and in many ways the most

† Aquatint is a method of acid-biting a metal plate in such a way that the effect of a graded wash is approximated, thus allowing nuances of light and shade not possible in ordinary etching. It is usually combined with etching, as in Goya's work. The process was developed as a secret one by Jean Baptiste Le Prince (1734–1781) and had become public property only shortly before Goya used it, having been revealed in a technical manual, *Encyclopédie Méthodique,* in 1791. Aquatint was particularly valuable to Goya since its wide range from deep shadow to brilliant light was so adaptable to the nightmarish illumination of the spectral regions he was creating.



84. Goya: *El Famoso Americano, Mariano Ceballos,* 1825. Lithograph, 12¼ x 15¾". Philadelphia Museum of Art, McIlhenny Fund.

philosophical; they are grotesque allegories whose interpretation Goya leaves up to the observer. Interpretation is not always possible in precise terms, but as the summation of all Goya's previous work the meaning of the *Disparates* is clear enough, and horrifying; Goya's deepest and bitterest experience is translated into fantasies of horror, outrage, and despair. On first publication they were given the title *Proverbios* (*Proverbs*) by the puzzled and no doubt frightened Academy. The title is apt, in that a proverb expresses some fundamental and enduring idea concerning man's life, disguised as humor or grotesquerie, but not apt in that proverbs grow out of the experience of a people, and the *Disparates* are Goya's own. The word means, approximately, *Fantastic Blunders.* Goya repeated the subjects in fresco on the walls of *La Quinta del Sordo;* the country villa became a compartment of hell transplanted into the Spanish countryside.

In 1824 Goya went into voluntary exile in France. Settled in Bordeaux, his eyesight failing and his vigor at last waning, he began working in the new medium of lithography* and produced four large stones continuing the *Tauromachia,* of an almost orgiastic vitality [84]. He died in Bordeaux in 1828, at eighty-two.

* Lithography, a process of drawing on prepared stone and then printing from it, was invented by Aloys Senefelder. It is the most direct of all the art printing processes, imposing a minimum of technical barrier between the artist's hand and the completed print. The artist draws on smooth stone just as he would do on paper; the drawing may be transferred repeatedly to paper with very little change in character. Lithographic darks are even richer than those of aquatint, and every nuance between black and white is possible. The fine-grained texture of the stone gives lithograph its particular individuality, although in modern variations of the technique other surfaces than stone are often used.

85. Goya: *El Pelele (The Manikin)*, 1791. 105 x 63". Prado, Madrid.

86. Goya: *Marquesa de San Andrès*, 1785–90. 33 x 22". Private collection.

Goya: His Innovations

The first influences on Goya as a painter were at odds with one another, and he was at odds with both of them. For a century Spain had been dependent on imported artists, and Goya was first subjected to the borrowed rococo forms of various Italian masters, the kind of painting that inspired David's revolt, and then to the art of Raphael Mengs, a neo-classicist of exceptional dryness, with whom he worked for a while. Goya rejected classicism on sight, but when Mengs and Francisco Bayeu used their influence to get him a place with the Royal Tapestry Works in Madrid in 1776, he produced a series of vivacious decorative paintings that easily hold their own alongside those of the eighteenth-century Italians whose tradition they follow. But even while Goya is painting within the rococo tradition of lightness and charm, sinister implications are at play beneath the artificial gaiety. The jolly girls who toss the puppet in a blanket in *El Pelele* [85] are young witches. If their victim is only a puppet, it is because they are still novices. Later they will substitute human carrion for the rag doll; this holiday in a park is only a rehearsal for a witches' sabbath.

Portrait commissions came Goya's way readily. His earliest portraits are rich technical displays with the models posed rather stiffly, a bit overweighted sometimes with incidental elaborations of costume, partly of course because the dress of the period so dictated, as in the portrait of the *Marquesa de San Andrès* [86]. The subject

is not deeply explored as a personality; we make our own deductions from the lively objectivity of Goya's re-creation of the lady's features, but we are not told much about her. She regards us with an alert and vigorous glance, yet as far as Goya's characterization of her as an individual is concerned, she might be any one of hundreds like her. But a few years later Goya stands the *Marquesa de La Solana* [87] before us as a complete individual. Her homely features are presented without idealization, but never for a moment does Goya regard any detail of them, or of her costume, as incidental portions of a still-life that happens to be composed of a human being dressed in a certain way. Every element in the portrait of the *Marquesa de La Solana* contributes to the creation of a total personality, subtly projected. The earlier *Marquesa de San Andrès* is a catalogue of accessories, and the fact that styles in dress had changed between the two portraits is only a superficial explanation of their difference. In the later one the lace of the skirt and the shawl could have been played up as accessory details; instead they are all but eliminated in the reduction of the composition to large simplified areas of blacks and grays, within which the pinkish tones of the face and the bow of ribbon perched above it take on an extraordinary life. The portrait is a play between the face and the ribbon bow; the reality of the face, its rather stubborn strength, is emphasized by its existence within the disharmoniously dainty and feminine frame of the shawl and the climax of the fashionable absurdity of the bow. Larger than the face and brighter in color, elegant and dainty where the face is plain and coarse-featured, the bow is the first thing one sees in the picture. But it immediately loses its battle for attention to the face beneath it, a face that appears to tolerate the incompatible accessories surrounding it as a concession to the necessities of mode but goes on about its own more important business without giving them further thought.

This superb portrait was painted just before Goya's climactic illness. As a piece of pure painting, it reflects his discovery of Velásquez in the royal collections, now accessible to him. It is also a prelude to his experiments in the use of color and the representation of form that were in full stride by 1800, the year of the portrait of the royal family. Historically these experiments are as important as Delacroix's later ones.

87. Goya: *Marquesa de La Solana,* 1791–95. 71¼ x 48". Louvre, Paris.

Goya was dissatisfied with the light, fresh touch of his early paintings and their clear, fresh, attractive but rather obvious decorative colors. As Delacroix was to do, he fumed against the painting methods that

made a painting only a kind of tinted drawing. His experiments were not in the same direction as Delacroix's were to be, but he was working away from the same dissatisfactions when he complained, "Always lines, never bodies! Where does one see lines in nature? I see only forms, forms that are lighted and forms that are not, planes that are near and planes that are far, projections, and hollows. I see no lines or details, I don't count each hair on the head of a passerby, or the buttons on his coat. There is no reason why my brush should see more than I do."

What this means is that Goya was hunting a way of painting that would present an image with the immediacy of instant vision. This, of course, is visual realism—not the search for an ideal and not the imitation of nature in detail, but the capturing in paint of the impact of life as we meet it head on. We see first in breadth, in masses; we receive a total impression that carries with it a certain emotional impact. Later we may examine things more closely, may relish the beauty of a line, the complexity of a part within the whole, may perceive individual hairs on a head or buttons on a coat down to the way they are sewed on. Such details may offer a great deal of interest or aesthetic pleasure, but to Goya's way of thinking they obscured the point, which was to capture the quality of the whole, to record it in such a way that its immediate vividness, as it impressed him, was expressed with truth at maximum intensity. Since a picture cannot be painted in the space of a glance, his problem was to discover a way of painting an image that would retain this immediate intensity. Of course this can always be done to some extent in a quick sketch. But that, again, was beside the point, since a sketch is only suggestive, and dependent for its effect on its very incompleteness. Along with immediacy and intensity Goya wanted the decision and the completeness that distinguish a work of art from a fragment of nature.

To work out some of the problems involved in training his brush not to "see more" than he did, Goya set himself an exercise that produced two of his most celebrated paintings, the paired *Nude Maja* [88] and *Clothed Maja** [90]. It was inevitable that legends should accumulate around such a startling pair of pictures, which look like anything but analytical studies in technique, and inevitable too that these legends should attach themselves to the Duchess of Alba. The most popular story is that the Duchess posed for the *Nude Maja* during the Duke's absence and that the *Clothed Maja* was dashed off quickly when the lovers received word of the Duke's imminent return, an anecdote false in every factual and psychological detail except that the features of the girl in the *Majas* are close to those of the Duchess in Goya's several portraits of her. But since Goya used these features as a type for the spirited, vixenish young beauties who populate his work, the resemblance means nothing.

The *Majas* were painted about 1800, the year David painted *Madame Récamier* [14], a perfect contrast to the *Clothed Maja,* opposing the fashionable grace and artificiality of the neo-classical portrait with the bold vitality of Goya's realism. The *Nude Maja* and Ingres's *Grande Odalisque* [89]—the comparison is legitimate in spite of the disparity of dates—are in even more extreme and enlightening contrast. With Delacroix's *Odalisque with Parrot* [91] the classical-romantic-realistic comparison is complete. In their different ways, the Frenchmen poeticized a nude model to accord with an arbitrary standard. Goya painted—magnificently—simply a naked girl, audacious, almost insolently matter-of-fact in her nakedness. If the figure is unidealized, if the nakedness is piquant be-

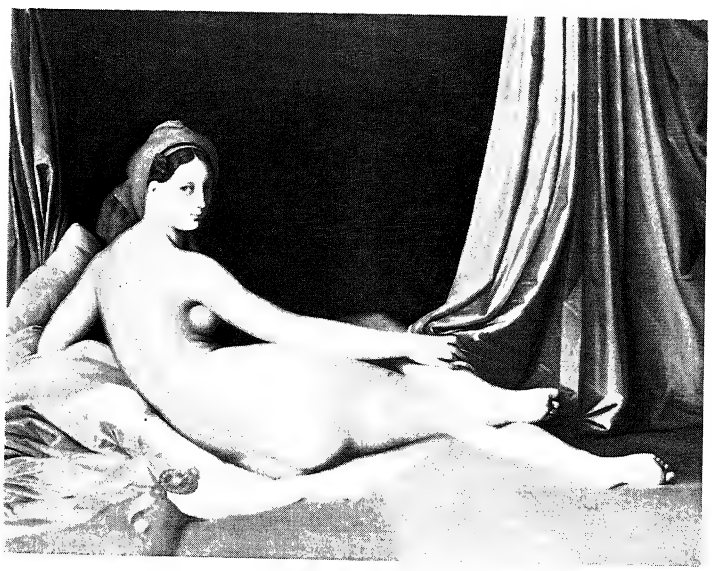
* *Maja* and its masculine equivalent *majo* are untranslatable. Dictionaries give *fop* or *dandy* for *majo*. *Gallant* is close. *Coquette* might do for *maja* but not very well. The words carry associations of youth, good looks or prettiness, city pleasures, flirtatious display, fancy dress without high fashion, and common rather than aristocratic origin, with probabilities of flexible morality. As part of an international movement of dandyism at the end of the eighteenth century, these Spaniards had their counterparts in England in the macaronis, and in France in the *merveilleuses,* who adopted eccentric modes of dress. The clothing worn by *majos* and *majas* eventually became the national dress of Spain.

88. GOYA: *Nude Maja, c.* 1797–98. 37⅜ x 74¾". Prado, Madrid. (Photo Anderson.)

89. INGRES: *Odalisque en Grisaille, c.* 1813, study for *Grande Odalisque.* 32¾ x 43". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Wolfe Fund.

cause the image seems so literal, this same literalness saves it from lasciviousness. It is too frank to be suggestive. As is always pointed out, its clothed companion piece with its gauzy, clinging, half-concealing half-revealing gown comes closer to being the suggestive one of the pair.

Technically the innovation in the *Majas* has to do with reducing the image to its essential planes, which are painted in bold, flat areas instead of being fused in subtle modulations from one to another. This does not mean a simpler, easier way of painting. Goya's boldness takes as much calculation as Ingres's subtlety; the forms and colors that seem so direct and uncomplicated are disposed in relationships as firmly integrated with one another as in any other form of picture-making. Delacroix's problem—"All precautions have to be taken to make the execution swift and decisive" in order not to lose "the extraordinary impression accompanying the conception"—is also Goya's, with the difference (in the case of the *Majas*) that where Delacroix is concerned with recording inner, emotional, impressions through exotic images, Goya presents us with what appears to be an image of brilliant external reality. The important words here are *what appears to be,* because Goya is not merely reproducing the object he sees, camera fashion. He is preserving his own vision of reality in such a way that we see it and respond to it as he did, not as



90. Goya: *Clothed Maja, c.* 1797–98. 37⅜ x 74¾". Prado, Madrid. (Photo Anderson.)

91. Delacroix: *Odalisque with Parrot,* 1827. 9½ x 12½". *Musée des Beaux Arts,* Lyon.

we might respond to the actual object if we saw it ourselves. If Goya had sought out new means of representation only in order to reproduce visual fact, the search would have been pointless. The point was to discover a new way of representation which, by preserving his own vision of the world, would be for him the best possible vehicle of expression.

The *Majas* occupy a special place in Goya's work as demonstrations, in addition to being arresting paintings in themselves. Expressively, however, they are excelled by other paintings where Goya's realism is an interpretative vehicle more than a technical process. One example is the portrait of *The Toreador José Romero* [92]. As pure painting the picture is opulent in texture and color, with the rich red lining of the cape curving up to the shoulder, the blue-green of the wide sash, the ruddy flesh tints, the blacks of the hair and the vest, and the pulsating lights everywhere on silks, velvets, and gilt embroidery. Against this brilliance Goya plays the reserved, even pensive, face of the young man. The hands, held so quietly, have an almost feminine delicacy, remindful of the precision, the refinements, the nuances, that differentiate a toreador from a butcher.

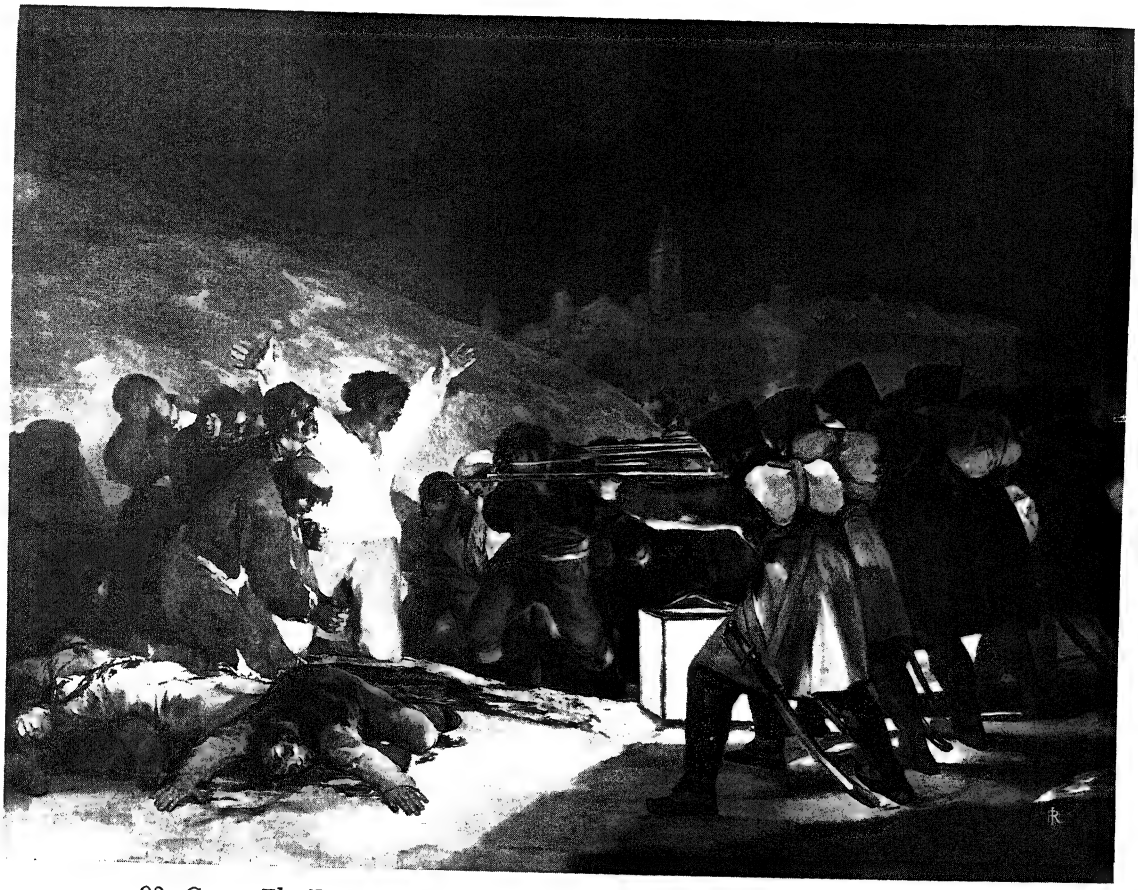
The difference between the *Majas* and a portrait like this one is the difference between an exercise in which the interest of the subject is incidental to its presentation,

and an interpretation in which presentation serves expression. Goya's genius here and in other portraits lies in his revelation of the character of the sitter in what appears to be an altogether objective statement of the features. Like many other painters, Goya achieves this revelation by controlling the objective reality through selection and modification of pose and details. Where an unimaginative portraitist would have posed his bullfighter in an attitude of theatrical braggadocio suggestive of the usual connotations of the bullring, Goya cut through this overlay of convention and habit and produced, instead, a painting that not only characterizes the sitter but extends its comment into the area of philosophical speculation. Yet all this is achieved through the devices of surface realism, without symbolical clues or idealistic references. It was to this end that Goya found it necessary to discover his way of painting in which "his brush should not see more than he did." And, once discovered, this way of painting served him not only as a painter of the familiar world but also as a painter of scenes of horror, fantasy, and violence, to which the quality of "immediate vision" brings an appalling reality.

On May 2, 1808, citizens of Madrid rioted against French soldiery, and on the following day the captured rioters were taken into the countryside near the city and shot. Goya recorded both events in a pair of pictures in 1814, six years after the events. If the picture of the executions of May 3 [93] had no other virtues, it would still demonstrate that Goya's way of seeing and painting "only forms, forms that are lighted and forms that are not, planes that are near and planes that are far, projections, and hollows" gives to the subject, painted long after the event, the quality of an event that happens as we look at it. The victims, and the barren mound behind them, stand out against a dark sky in an explosion of light and blood. One man spreads his raised arms in defiance against the executioners. Another, a priest, prays; another seems only half comprehending; others clutch at themselves in terror or hide their faces in despair. Ranged in front of them, the uniformed soldiers, rifles firing, are like automatons. Their faces are not shown, their stances are identical, they are painted in dull grays and browns. This depersonalization accentuates the humanity of the victims, and especially it makes the central defiant figure a symbol of the individual's revolt against the forces of organized oppression, even though, in Goya's world, he is impotent before them.

92. Goya: *The Toreador José Romero,* date unknown. 36 x 29½". Collection Mrs. Carroll S. Tyson, Chestnut Hill, Pa.

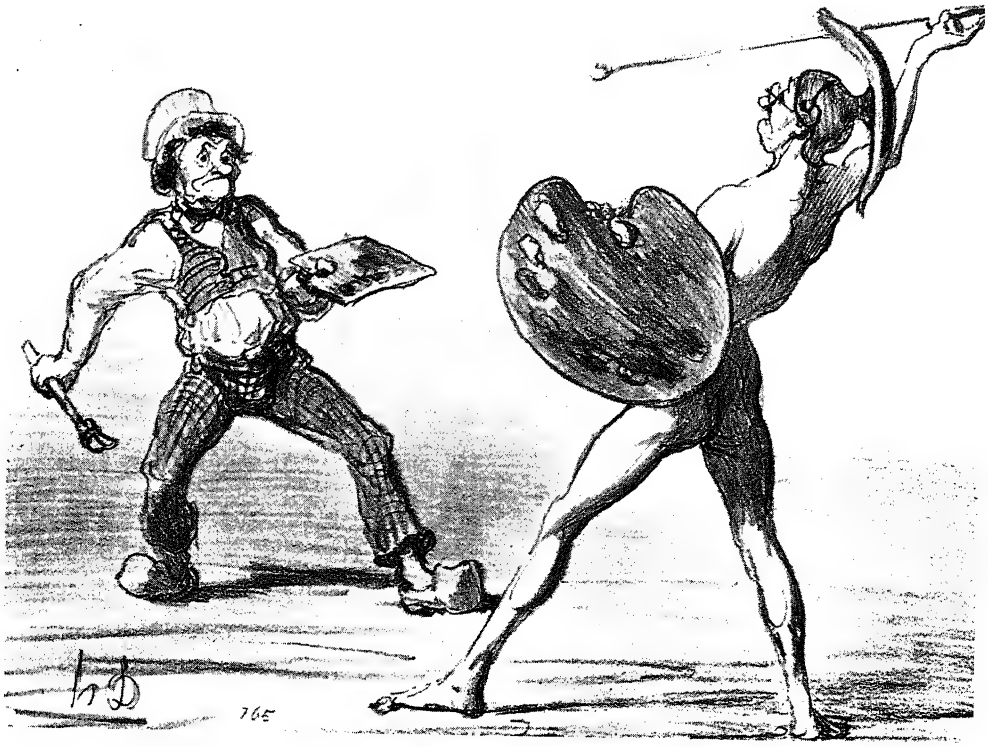
Not much later, Delacroix was to commemorate a similar popular uprising in Paris, which took place in 1830, with his *Liberty Leading the People* [94]. As a romantic idealist he gives us a flurry and surge of drapery around an allegorical female figure leading other figures who thus, inevitably, lose their human identity and become allegorical symbols also. Or, if we try to regard them as human beings, they



93. Goya: *The Executions of May 3, 1808,* 1814. 104¾ x 135⅞". Prado, Madrid. (Photo Anderson.)

94. Delacroix: *Liberty Leading the People,* 1830. 102½ x 128". Louvre, Paris.

are at best actors in a costumed pageant. Goya's central figure of the man with arms spread wide may be, as we have just said, something like a "symbol" of the spirit of liberty unquenchable in mankind, but if Goya had such an idea in mind he delivered it in terms of the facts of this world, not in a vision of an artificial one. Both pictures can be compared with *The Oath of the Horatii* [6] as a third treatment of the same general theme: the individual's sacrifice of self to an ideal of freedom and justice. Of the three, Goya's alone meets the world on its own terms. David's by this standard (which, of course, is not the standard to which David aspires) is chilly and abstract; Delacroix's is a bit high-flown. In both of them life serves as material for art, which then becomes important for its own sake,



95. DAUMIER: *The Battle of Schools,* from *Le Charivari,* 1855. Lithograph.

relegating life to second place. In Goya the raw material of life is ordered and intensified by an art that reveals, but never takes precedence over, the world in which man lives. This is why Goya is first a realist, although he is as dramatic as any romantic, as fantastic as any visionary. His art became a mine for later movements whose aims might even be at loggerheads with one another—impressionism, expressionism, even surrealism, all of which we will see. Goya demonstrates again that the arbitrary boundaries of one ism or another are never wide enough to encompass the total of a great artist's work.

This is especially true of another artist who by classification must be called a realist, a man who knew the world as well as Goya did, who painted it as literally yet more intimately, who was as aware of man's foibles and vanities as Goya was, and suffered more from them—yet who found man good where Goya found him ultimately base: the Frenchman Honoré Daumier.

Daumier: Realism and Bourgeois Culture

Daumier (1808–1879) was born in Marseille the year of the riots in Madrid and the executions of May 3. By 1830, the year of the uprisings celebrated in Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People,* he was working at his first job in Paris as cartoonist for a publication called *La Caricature.* During the next forty years he produced some 4,000 popular cartoons by which he made his living as well as innumerable drawings and sketches and hundreds of paintings. Daumier was the noblest realist of them all; he was one of the finest painters of any school in nineteenth-century France; and he was buried in a pauper's grave at the age of seventy-one.

Just as romanticism had been the natural expression of the turbulence of the first half of the nineteenth century in France, so realism replaced it just as naturally as an expression of the second half. Daumier

96. DAUMIER: *Boy Running*, date unknown. Crayon and Wash, 6 x 9". National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Rosenwald Collection.

lived in the era of the *Bourgeoisie Triumphant*, the practical, matter-of-fact, cautious, comfort-loving man, scornful of theory if it did not serve a tangible, profitable end (hence he was no classicist) and suspicious of passion if it threatened his security (and hence he was not a romantic). He was the realistic man, the little man of great common sense.

If his world sounds like an infertile one for the artist, that is only because we forget what an artist is: if he is truly creative, an artist absorbs the gross experience of his time and distills from it its essential meaning. In France, around the middle years of the century, creative men in all the arts ceased to yearn toward ancient Greece and Rome, returned from the long jaunt to the Orient and began to examine things as they found them at home. They discovered in the prosaic world infinite material and, above all, infinite variety. They discovered that a peasant woman was a better subject for them than Ceres, that a respectable bourgeoise housewife offered possibilities not even hinted at by Venus, and even that a common prostitute could be painted or written about more rewardingly than a harem full of odalisques. A street in Paris was discovered to be more dramatic than an Arabian lion hunt. And if a woman choosing a hat in a millinery shop was involved in making a decision less strenuous than the ones made by the Horatii or the Sabines, nevertheless her dilemma had its own legitimacy and could be the subject of a work of art commenting on human life.

Nor need such a comment be trivial. It had, among other advantages, the great one of being a comment made at first hand, as if made on the spot instead of being trumped up in the studio. To make such comments at full force, painters invented new techniques that horrified the Academy and eventually destroyed it as a potent force in French art. Artists discovered in realism the most flexible of all approaches to expression. Freed from the restrictions and

recipes of classicism, no longer goaded by the romantic obligation to theatricalize, they discovered that the world around them offered everything, that at last the individual was freed to speak as he chose about what interested him most, to interpret the world according to his own convictions instead of echoing another man's formula. Classicism had shrunk like a dried pea; romanticism had swollen until it burst; realism offered the world of everyday as the painter's lodestone.

Realism served painters of all temperaments. Within the world at hand the man of classical temperament could find images of universal truths. The romantically inclined could find the passion he yearned for. The cynic, the sentimentalist, the social theorist, the objectivist, the wit—each might create his own image from the raw material of a single subject that in itself might be the most commonplace fragment of the world, familiar to everybody. Thus in its very flexibility, realism became more demanding than either classicism or romanticism had been: without the established devices of a David or a Delacroix to follow, the realist was exposed as whatever kind of man he was, big or little of spirit, imaginative or pedestrian in his perception of the world.

Daumier is the French counterpart of Goya in his contempt for hypocrisy, falsehood, and injustice. If he is a lesser master, it is because he was never allowed to reach full stature as a painter. Goya's *Caprichos* were withdrawn a few days after they were published, and he escaped punishment by the tribunal of the Inquisition for the temerity of his subjects only because he had had the greater temerity to dedicate them to Charles IV (who could have found everything he stood for attacked in them) and to seek, successfully, the King's protection. But Daumier, on the other hand, was imprisoned for a published caricature of his king, and his serious work was curtailed in 1835 under severe restrictions of the freedom of the press. Hobbled by poverty, without a market for his kind of painting, he was unable to paint at all until he was forty, and then he painted in complete obscurity with neither the time nor the money—and, for that matter, not the reason—to do the ambitious pictures that force an artist's growth and prove his mettle. But Daumier was a great painter, and certainly one of the two or three finest draughtsmen of his century. And if compassionate observation of man in his frailty and his nobility is a standard of comparison, then Daumier surpasses Goya, and only Rembrandt, in the seventeenth century, can keep him company.

97. DAUMIER: *Grandes Eaux à Versailles,* from *Le Charivari,* July 28, 1844. Lithograph, 9 1/16 x 7 1/4". The title is a pun, *Grandes Eaux* being literally *Great Waters* but referring to Versailles's famous fountains. Collection Carl Zigrosser, Philadelphia.

Because he was a man of the nineteenth century, Daumier, unlike Rembrandt, made his most profound statements by means of the most commonplace subjects, usually the city streets and the ordinary people in them. Instead of inventing allegories, fan-

98. DAUMIER: *Saprelotte!—Full!*, from *Le Charivari*, 1848. Lithograph, 10¼ x 8⅝". Collection Carl Zigrosser, Philadelphia.

99. DAUMIER: *Before Moreau's Picture at the Salon*, from *Le Charivari*, 1864. Lithograph, 9½ x 8¼". Collection Carl Zigrosser, Philadelphia.

tasies, and nightmares as Goya did to reveal man's nature, Daumier observed the attitudes men assumed and the expressions on their faces and reproduced their essence, while seeming only to sketch them casually, candid-camera fashion, as they went about the routine of their daily affairs.

Daumier: Social and Political Comment

Daumier was an untrained artist. He learned to draw by observation; he never dissected a body, but he knew more about the way a body moves, the way muscles and fat are disposed upon the skeleton, than any painter who made a fetish of classical anatomy. *The Battle of Schools* [95] is a caricature comment on the revolt of the realistic painter against academic idealism. A dirty little fellow in peasant clothes, armed with a thick heavy brush, faces a skinny academician, posed in the attitude of David's Romulus from *The Sabines* and armed with a palette and a mahl stick (which was an accessory to the creation of the slick finish of academic painting). The reason this burlesque of the beautiful body of David's classical athlete is so funny is that its comic exaggerations of a skinny naked man are so true, so logical. These shrunken hams and knobby joints and pipestem legs are at least as brilliant a variation on the human form as are the Davidian forms they caricature, and they are based on a more supple familiarity with anatomical fact.

Daumier learned to draw as a caricaturist, and in his transition from caricature to serious painting he held to the strict economy of statement which is caricature's essence. In a few bent lines and an area or two of wash he could capture the physical mass, the action, and the inner nature of his subject, whether a group of people waiting at a station or a frightened boy running [96]. In this way, too, he resembles Rembrandt, who was Daumier's drawing master as nearly as he ever had one.

100. DAUMIER: *Behind in the Rent,* from *Le Charivari,* 1847. Lithograph, 10⅛ x 7½".

101. DAUMIER: *Turtledoves—Just the Way We Were,* from the series *Tout ce qu'on voudra,* 1848. Lithograph, 10½ x 9". Both Collection Carl Zigrosser, Philadelphia.

Daumier is the only important painter of the nineteenth century in France whose development was entirely independent of the Academy and the Salon: he neither received their favors nor needed to battle their opposition. This was because he did not regard himself as a painter with a career to make and a reputation to establish. He was a professional artist with a living to earn, and he earned it by working against deadlines for periodicals.

Such work could have been a prostitution of his genius if he had curried favor by yielding to popular standards. Instead, Daumier created a new standard that lifted the cartoon of social and political comment to the level of serious art. Even when his cartoons are most humorous they are never entirely trivial. When he draws a funny face, it is also the face of a specific character, produced by a way of life acting upon a temperament. In it we recognize an individual of a social type within a complicated social system.

The favorite target of Daumier's benign exposures was the lower middle class, uncomfortable in its dutiful pretensions to gentility [97–101]. He shows its members exhausted and puzzled at Salon exhibitions, drenched in their Sunday best by sudden downpours on an excursion to Versailles, harassed by squawling brats who nullify the order and comfort of their flats, reduced to a thousand indignities by the frictions and irritations of living with their fellows who never quite recognize in them the superiorities they aspire to within themselves. Behind in their rent, they have humiliating encounters with the landlord on the stairs. The bus doesn't wait for them. Friends yawn at their funny stories; their collars are always too tight or too loose; and they realize one day that they and their mates look terrible in their bathing suits. But their lives are also full of sudden small domestic felicities. A middle-aged couple resting under a tree remember their youth as they watch birds nesting. Young parents glow

102. Guys: The King and Queen of Greece and their suite passing the base of the Acropolis, 1854. Pencil and watercolor, 10¾ x 16. Collection T. Edward Hanley, Bradford, Pa.

with pride at their little boy, although he is an absurd replica of his pompous father. Friends exchange intellectual platitudes about the Salon success of the year, impressed with one another's acumen.

The quality that raises these typical Daumier cartoons above the level of humorous journalism should be apparent when they are compared with the pictorial reporting of Daumier's contemporary, Constantin Guys (1805–1892), who is now recognized as a minor master although, like Daumier, he was seldom thought of as an artist during his lifetime. Guys seems to have been in accord with this opinion; today he would probably have been a news photographer.

Guys avoided attention and his life is not well documented, but what we know of it is fascinating enough. At eighteen he was a soldier with Byron in the Greek war, and four years later he was a dragoon in the French army. He traveled everywhere in Europe and went to the Orient. For a while he lived in London, giving lessons in French and in drawing and selling sketches to magazines. At the middle of the century (which his life nearly spanned) he was a war correspondent for the *Illustrated London News*, one of the few journals of the time carrying pictures of current events; he covered the Revolution of 1848 and the Crimean War. Between wars he covered the ballet, opera, and the like.

His wonderful sketches, done on the spot, would be sent to the journal for wood engraving, the means of reproduction then most in use. They would lose much of their own character in this translation, but many of the originals still exist. The one illustrated here [102] shows the King in the streets of Athens, and some of the notes scribbled across the lower part of the drawing read: "For details of costumes of the parties in the Royal Cortège, the gendarmes, the people crowding the gardens, lining the street, etc. etc., see the annexed sketches. Acropolis on the right further up in the back-

ground the new observatory—built on top of the hill. Carriages in the garden crowded with ladies with national and French fashionable costume indifferently." From notes like these the wood engravers filled in details. Sometimes a drawing would bear a note such as, "Observe all details of costume, they are entirely accurate, change background at will—make it snow if you wish."

But only a fraction of the drawings and watercolors of modes and manners for which Guys is best known [103] were done for reproduction; he seems to have drawn all the time, year after year, thousands of drawings. Pen or pencil with wash, sometimes monochrome, sometimes with a touch or two of additional color, sometimes watercolor in a few fresh clear tints, were his medium. He evokes the epoch of the Second Empire with its crinolines, its courtesans, its display, its high style flavored with a dash of vulgarity—the epoch's, not Guys's. One of his favorite subjects was the promenade in the Bois de Boulogne, with its prancing horses and its carriages filled with women in great masses of finery—hats, ruffles, ribbons, shawls, with lace-trimmed umbrellas rising above them like the smallest flowers springing out of great bouquets.

Among his contemporaries, Guys, like Daumier, had a few admirers among knowledgeable painters and critics. The great Manet (soon to be seen) was one of them, and Baudelaire published a famous article on him in the journal *Figaro* in 1863 (but written in 1859) called "A Painter of Modern Life." (Guys refused to let his name be printed, but permitted the use of his initial, which occasionally appears on a drawing.) Baudelaire recognized the elegance of Guys's style, and the deft economy with which the artist caught the visual essence of his subjects. But compared with Daumier, Guys is a reporter with exceptional vivacity and charm but not much depth. This is comparison with a giant, and does not affect the truth that Guys is an artist of stature as well as a recorder of the modes and manners of a particular society. His drawings are works of art marked by finesse and flair and infallible sensitivity to the most telling details of fashionable trappings. But Daumier's cartoons are works of art rooted in the same humanitarian spirit that inspired his greatest painting.

103. Guys: *Une Elegante*, 1850–60. Watercolor, 15¼ x 10½". Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass., Maurice Wertheim Collection.

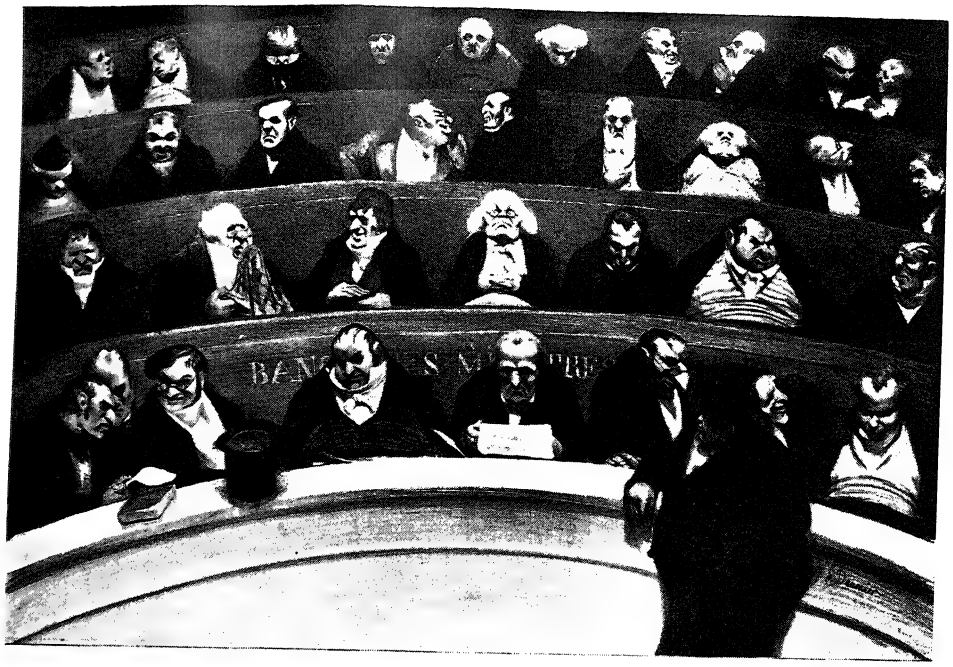
Daumier's cartoons are based upon the assumption, never questioned, that man is good, whatever indignities, absurdities, and brutalizations life may inflict upon him. This was also Rembrandt's assumption, except that Rembrandt could not go so far as to admit the absurdities. That Daumier admits them, even cherishes them, explains the attraction held for him by a favorite subject, Don Quixote [104]. The addlepated old man, mounted on his bony nag of a charger, his own bony silhouette topped off by the tin basin he imagines to be a knightly helmet, rides forth toward one imagined chivalric adventure after another, followed by his fat, stolid, uncomprehending and loyal lackey, Sancho Panza, who pulls his master out of one mud puddle or dung heap after another, where the old man's adventures always end. The story of Don Quixote is nominally a satire on the

104. Daumier: *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza*, date unknown. 22¾ x 33¾". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Charles S. Payson, New York.

105. Daumier: *The Witnesses*, 1872. Lithograph, 10 x 8¾". Metropolitan Museum of Art.

romantic foolishness of chivalric fiction, but it is also an undercover affirmation of the invincibility of the spirit: after each humiliating fall the old man pulls himself together and dodders forth toward a new one, his illusions intact. The paunchy bourgeois who gets caught in the rain, who misses his bus, who goes through a terrible world sustained by a blind, unreasoning conviction of his own importance to Daumier, this paunchy bourgeois is noble in his absurdity if he remains an honest man.

But when Daumier is confronted with corruption, stupidity, hypocrisy, or chicanery in high places, his tolerance vanishes. *The Witnesses* [105] could serve as well today as an indictment of warmongers as it did in 1872. In fact it has done so, in hundreds of descendants, ever since. The politicians ranged in tiers in *Le Ventre Législatif* (*The Legislative Belly* [106] usually more politely translated as *The Legislative Body*, at the expense of Daumier's point) are individually identifiable



106. DAUMIER: *Le Ventre Législatif*, 1834. Lithograph 11 x 17". Collection Carl Zigrosser, Philadelphia.

as Louis Philippe's henchmen, but even without this reference the caricatures stand as murderous revelations of the mentality of corrupt political opportunists anywhere, any time.

In the same year as *Le Ventre Législatif*, 1834, Daumier published the great lithograph, *Rue Transnonain* [107]. At the time of its publication the title was enough to explain the scene where a family lies murdered in the disorder of a bedroom—a father in nightshirt and nightcap, lying on the body of his child, with the body of a woman in the shadows at the left, and the head of an older man projecting into the picture at the right. The Rue Transnonain was a street in Paris inhabited by workers who were suspected of participation in the disorders of the Republican Revolt of 1834. When it was fired on from an apartment house, the civil guard broke in and shot the inhabitants, innocent or guilty.

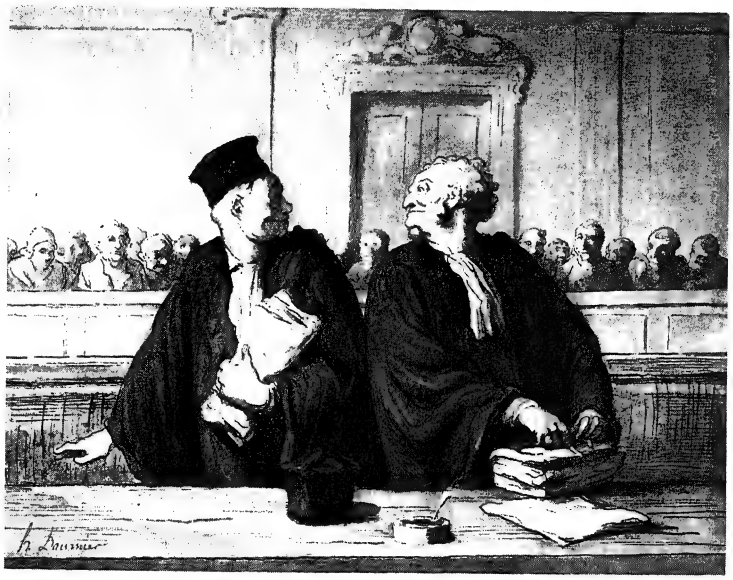
David, as he did in *Marat* [9] would have idealized the figures in the scene as far as possible, certainly substituting a beautiful body for that of the stocky, paunchy father. The rumpled nightshirt would have fallen into folds of classical purity. Delacroix would have chosen a different moment, perhaps the tumultuous entrance of the guard into the room, a swirl of figures, a sort of *Sardanapalus* [49] or a *Scio* [46] in a new locale. Either artist, on the evidence of similar achievements, might have produced a fine picture. But Daumier rejects these dramas to bring us into the room, in all its commonplaceness. He shows us the grossness of the father, the intimate disorder of the bed, and the woman's body sprawled and ugly, the more pathetic because it is mercilessly real.

Daumier: His Faith

Daumier turned out his lithographic cartoons for popular consumption in journals on the average of three a week, with occasional individual stones, such as *Rue Transnonain*, for general sale. In the humorous cartoons having to do with the daily scene, the faith Daumier lived by is only implied in the affectionate quality of his raillery. More searching comments would have been

107. DAUMIER: *Rue Transnonain,* 1834. Lithograph, 11¼ x 17⅜". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Bequest of Fiske Kimball.

108. DAUMIER: *After the Trial,* date unknown. Watercolor, 11 x 14¼". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Anonymous Loan.



inappropriate, wasted, and for that matter impossible, since no man can produce three major works every seven days.

But in his paintings, which were known to only a few people during his lifetime, he speaks at full strength to say that, in spite of Rue Transnonains, Legislative Bellies, and the skeletons of men killed by war and starvation, mankind is good. This is Daumier's faith. The mere fact that he held it does not make him a greater or a lesser artist than a pessimist like Goya. Optimism and pessimism are not aesthetic qualities. Nor, of course, is it "good" or virtuous to believe that mankind is "good." Pollyannaism is likely to be more dangerous than skepticism, sentimentalism more vicious than cynicism. But Daumier is neither a Pollyanna nor a sentimentalist, and his conviction that mankind is ultimately good must be recognized if his painting is to be understood as anything more than a representation of people going about the routine of their daily affairs.

In his paintings Daumier seldom accuses, preferring to affirm the triumph of good rather than to expose the evils standing in its way. True, there are the numerous savage representations of lawyers [108], who for Daumier, familiar with the venal courts

of the period, were a compound of arrogance, pomposity, and corruption, feeding on the ills and confusions of other men. But for all their trenchancy, these pictures are exceptions. We need only compare the *Third Class Carriage* [109], with its young peasant mother and children accompanied by the old grandmother, with any young beauty and old hag of Goya's to understand that, where Goya believes that life is a process of physical and moral corruption, Daumier finds life ultimately incorruptible —by its very force of growth and continuation, if by nothing else.

Daumier states this conclusion even more universally in *Soup* [110], where the peasant mother feeds voraciously on the food she has torn from the earth while her child suckles at her breast. The two figures are bound together in a circular pattern of lines suggesting in their inevitable continuity not only the endless cycle of life but, by their fierce vitality, the triumphant force of man's constant self-regeneration.

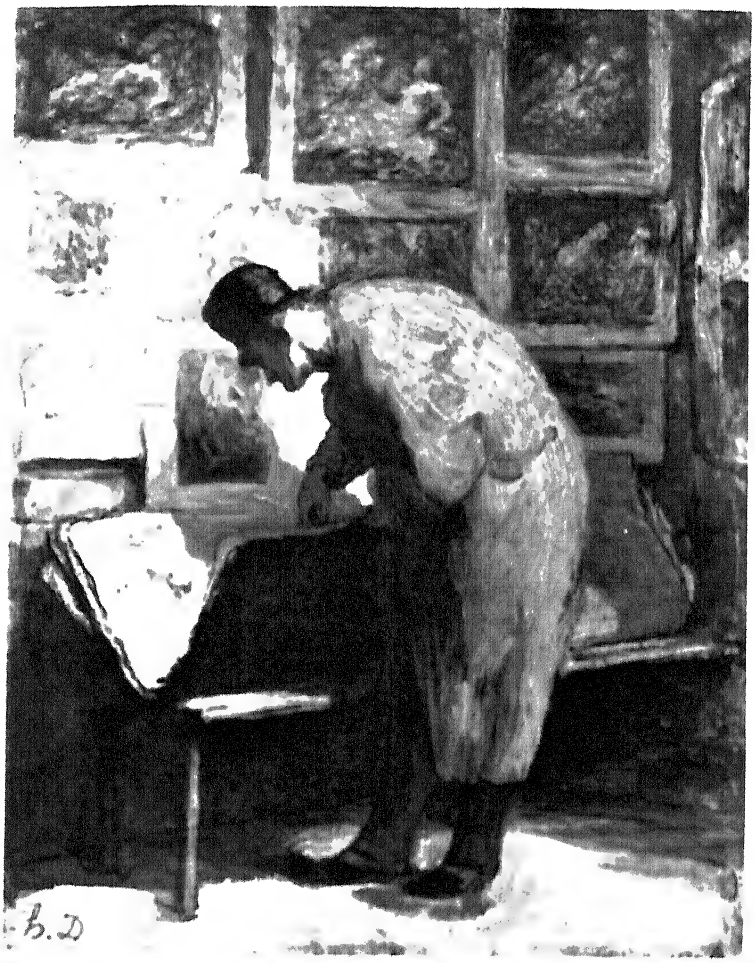
Yet, magnificent as they are, Daumier's pictures of peasants, of people close to the soil, are not his most individual or his most subtle achievements. His peasants are still related to "nature's noblemen," not too much changed from the "noble savage" conceived in the eighteenth century. And while Daumier was working, the painter Millet (to be seen shortly) was also discovering the peasant in similar interpretations. Daumier's individual achievement rests, finally, in his discovery of human nobility in a more obscure quarter: that vast middle ground between the man of the soil at one end and the man of worldly position or intellectual achievement at the other, within the dreary reaches of undistinguished city streets where ordinary people live out their lives in rented cells. Daumier's man is the little man of good will whom he first discovered by satirizing him, the good bourgeois who for all his confusions is neither vicious nor a fool in the long run. In *The Print Collector* [111], Daumier declares his faith in this man as a rational creature.

The Print Collector is painted in a few scrubs of color dominated by grays and browns. It shows a man of no particular

109. DAUMIER: *Third Class Carriage, c.* 1862. 25¾ x 35½". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

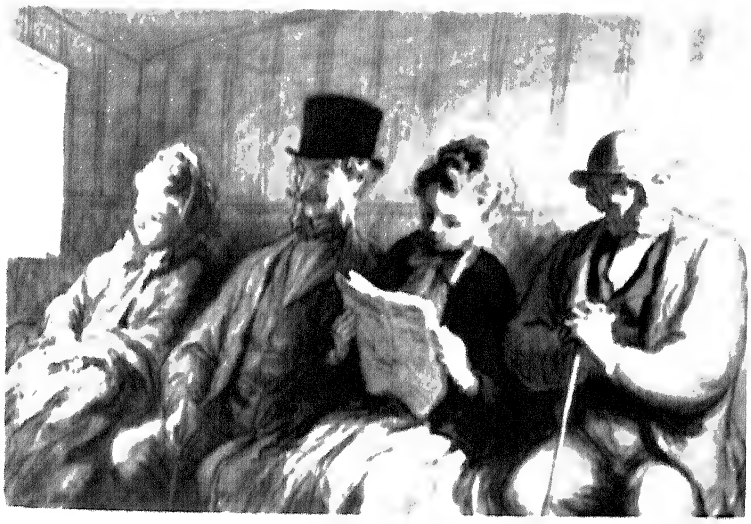
110. DAUMIER: *Soup,* date unknown. Wash drawing, 11 x 15¾". Louvre, Paris.

distinction or individuality, although he exists vividly, looking through a portfolio of prints in a small shop. His figure is reduced nearly to silhouette; the simplification is extreme, but an additional line of detail would be superfluous. The man is all there —the body beneath the clothes, the spirit within the body. The clothes tell us of a position in the world—not a position of any consequence; the body tells us other facts—



111. Daumier: *The Print Collector*, date unknown. 13⅜ x 10¾". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Wilstach Fund.

112. Daumier: *First Class Carriage*, 1864. Wash drawing, 8 x 11¾". Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.



age, and that this is a city man, for instance. We do not need to deduce these various facts. We are presented with them complete, in the total impression of the man's reality, as we might understand them at a glance, without deduction or specification, if he passed us on the street. We can say flatly that this is a middle-class man who collects prints as a hobby; beyond that, we may ponder the idea that print-collecting is not a necessary animal function, such as feeding and sleeping; and that, hence, it is proof that this is a human being possessed like other human beings of the thing that separates him from the animals, called intellect, soul, consciousness, ego, or any of dozens of other names. We may even point to various means Daumier has used to say this. We can make a symbol, for instance, of the way the figure emerges from mysterious shadows into even more mysterious lights. But in the end we cannot altogether explain how Daumier says that man is part of a miracle so good that none of his frailties is of any importance when balanced against the fact of his existence.

Daumier's basic premise of goodness alleviates the melancholy of his second one: that within the crowds and conformity of the city the individual is psychologically isolated. Daumier is the first painter to express this phenomenon of modern life. He represents his print collector alone—literally alone in the picture, although the crowds passing on the street, the proprietor of the shop, and other customers are certainly near by. And each of the people in the *First Class Carriage* [112] is alone in his own world, even while crowded side by side with the other passengers. In some of Daumier's pictures men establish a tenuous bridge between themselves. An artist shows his prints to a collector; two men ponder a game of chess, warmed by an illusion of intimacy through recognition of the identity of their mutual isolation; prisoners sing together [113]; old friends share a drink at a table in a garden [114]. These moments of intimacy are poignant because they are rare. In *The Drama* [115] Daumier shows us an audience carried away by a performance on the stage, each man unconscious of the shouldering and pressing of the other

people around him, absorbed in an illusion created by shoddy scenery and wild posturings, an illusion more real than his contact with his fellow men will be when the performance is over and he leaves the theater with the crowd.

Daumier: His Life

A few facts of Daumier's life are pertinent here. Daumier showed precocious talent as a child, but his family, which had moved from his birthplace of Marseilles to Paris, refused to let him study art. He entered painting by the back door of journalism. At twenty-two he was doing political cartoons on *La Caricature*, and it was for one of these that he was imprisoned for six months, when he was twenty-four. This was in 1832, and the cartoon was *Gargantua*, showing Louis Philippe swallowing bags of gold extracted from the people.

Daumier's drawing at this period was rather solidly modeled within closed outlines, as can still be seen in *Le Ventre Législatif* and *Rue Transnonain*. His history as a draughtsman is one of steady change toward a more broken, open, nervous, expressive line, with greater and greater economy of modeling, as evident in the other drawings just illustrated. A pen and ink drawing of a horse and rider [116] shows how far he carried this technique.

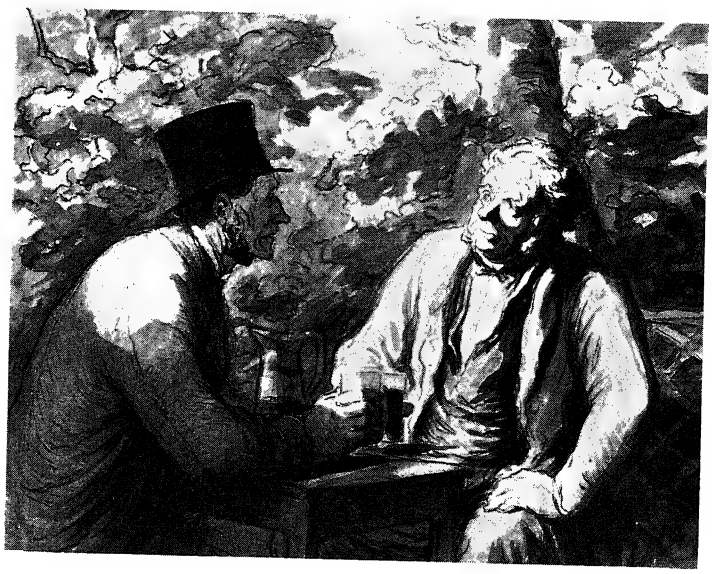
In 1835 *La Caricature* was replaced by *Le Charivari** on which Daumier worked for the rest of his professional life. The realistic novelist Balzac was also a member of its staff and commented that "this boy has some Michelangelo under his skin." Baudelaire was one of the very few others who recognized in Daumier something more than a skillful commercial cartoonist.

In 1877 Daumier's eyes failed after forty years of overwork. Corot, a saint among painters, had given him a small country cottage some years before, and Daumier retired there on a state pension awarded him by the Third Republic. The pension was more than deserved. Under the various regimes since 1830 Daumier had been unyieldingly and courageously a republican propagandist.

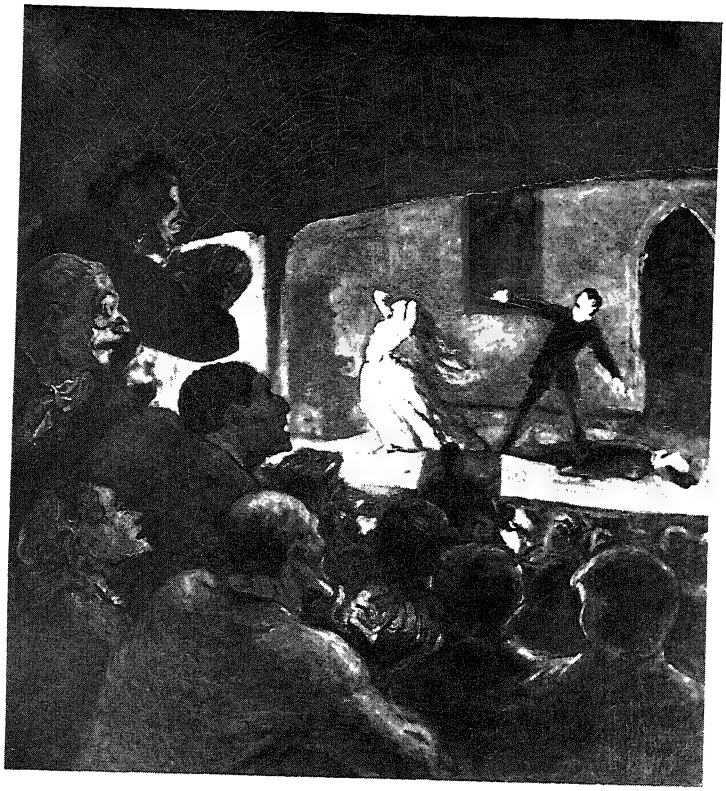
When Daumier died two years after his retirement the hundreds of paintings in his

113. DAUMIER: *Prison Choir*, date unknown. 19¾ x 24". Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

114. DAUMIER: *The Good Friends*, date unknown. Wash drawing, 9¼ x 11⅞". Baltimore Museum of Art.



* A *charivari* is a mock serenade of discordant noises, made by beating on pots and pans, howling, and yelling, beneath the windows of someone who has given displeasure—a good name for a critical journal.



115. DAUMIER: *The Drama,* date unknown. 38 x 35". *Neue Stadtgalerie,* Munich.

116. DAUMIER: *Rider,* date unknown. Pen drawing, 8¼ x 10½". Private collection.

little house were purchased by a syndicate from his widow for almost nothing. When they were put on the market years later, plus numerous forgeries that still cause confusion, they were worth a fortune. The paintings date from 1848, when Daumier presented an allegorical figure of the Republic in a competition for mural decorations in the Hôtel de Ville—which, of course, he did not win. His first exhibition was arranged in 1878 just before his retirement, when he was seventy years old. Thus it happened that the school of realism, where in retrospect Daumier is a major figure, had been born, had fought its battles, and had given way to a new variant called impressionism before these realistic masterpieces were known.

In the meanwhile realism's battles had been fought, not expertly but with the greatest of pleasure, under the leadership of a painter who fell half by accident into that position, a man a decade younger than Daumier who died the year before Daumier's tardy exhibition, and who had left France some years before that—Gustave Courbet.

Courbet: His Theories versus His Practice

The theories of realism as advanced by Courbet (1819–1877) were not very complicated. Neither were they always very clear, since Courbet was not much of an analytical thinker. When it was necessary for him to formulate a written statement, he did so with the help of friends who were better at words than he was. Perhaps this explains why what Courbet said about painting and what he did in painting never quite agree. With the best intentions in the world his friends were likely to clarify his half-formed theories in directions expedient to purposes immediately at hand, with less regard for Courbet's painting than for their own convictions.

"Show me an angel and I will paint one" is the bluntest of Courbet's pronouncements. He held that "painting is an essentially concrete art, and can consist only of the representation of things both real and

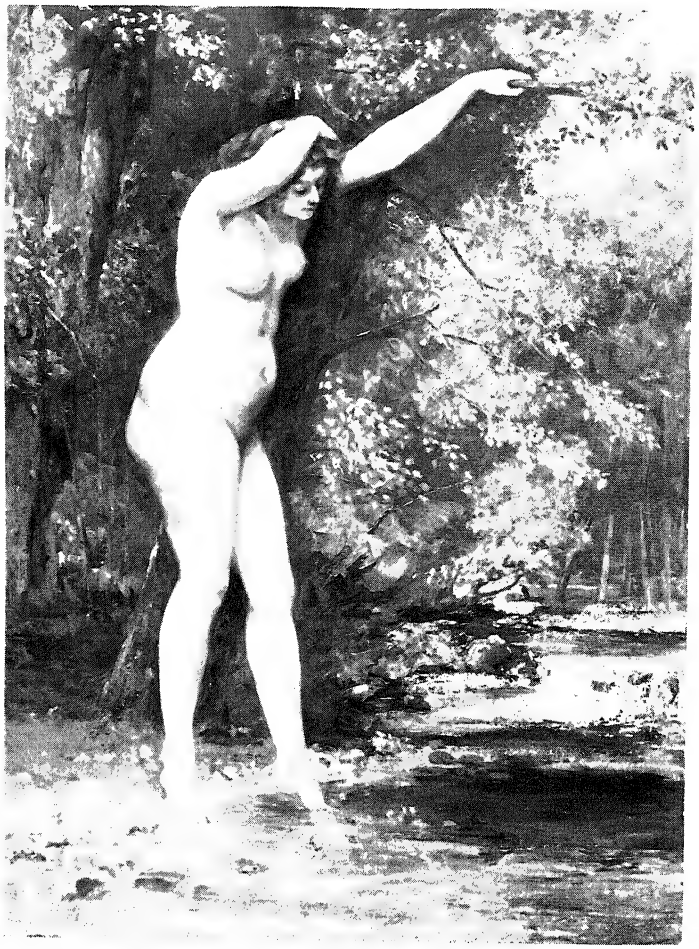
existing"—a limitation that would have ruled out all classical painting except portraits, all romantic invention, and most of the work of the old masters most admired by Courbet himself.

Nor is Courbet's own painting so objective as such pronouncements imply it should be. Although he stated that he wanted to "translate the customs, the ideas, and the look" of his own time into pictures, he added that he wanted to do so "according to his own understanding" of them. This means that while he referred directly to the world around him for his material, instead of to an imagined antiquity or a romantic Orient, he interpreted what he saw rather than merely transcribing it. And if he did not paint angels, if he painted only what he could see, what Courbet chose to see was unusually dramatic rather than prosaic. Even when a subject was nominally prosaic, he observed it more romantically than would be expected from a painter tagged "realist" and dedicated to the annihilation of the romantic ideal. His realism was conscious, but his romanticism was inborn.

It must be remembered, too, that we see Courbet's innovations in reverse perspective. We look at them from this side, across an intervening century during which realism went far beyond Courbet in the direction he set. From this distance he seems as romantic as he does realistic, but in the Salons of his own time his realism was extreme.

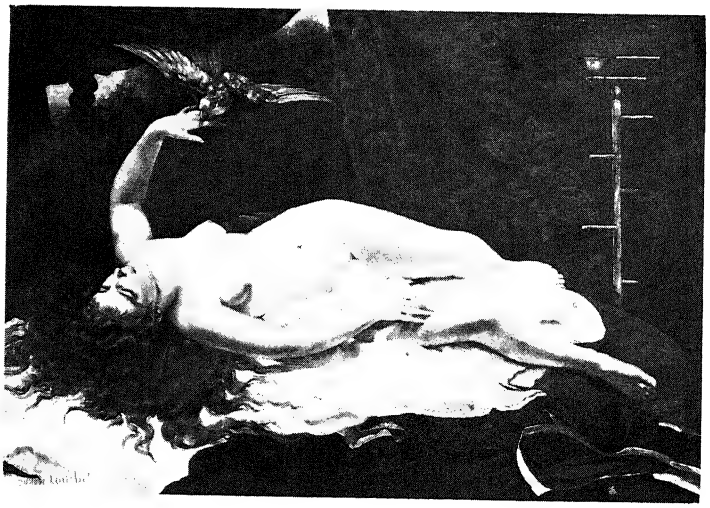
But all these considerations are historical. Historically it is important that Courbet was called a realist, an anti-idealist. But beyond that, beyond realism or idealism or any other ism, Courbet is a painter, in the purest sense of the word *painter*. His paint simply as paint, as a rich oily substance applied to canvas, is magnificent.

His *Young Bather* [117] is typical of many Courbets that are likely today to strike us first with the mincing artificiality of the pose. The fact that in combination with this artificiality the model is painted with a high degree of realism may even make the picture a bit ludicrous; standards in feminine beauty have changed, and we see only an overweight young woman affecting an unconvincing daintiness. The es-



117. COURBET: *Young Bather,* 1866. 51¼ x 38¼". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

118. COURBET: *Woman with a Parrot,* 1866. 51 x 77". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection.



119. COURBET: *Two Girls on the Banks of the Seine,* 1856. 66½ x 81⅛". *Petit Palais,* Paris.

sential realism of the picture is further compromised by the landscape background that has been trumped up behind the figure. The branch the model holds in her left hand is retouched with a few leaves, but it is still a studio prop not very convincingly related to the tree it is supposed to grow from. Such inconsistencies conceal the revolutionary character of the *Young Bather,* although nothing can conceal the magnificence of its painting.

In the *Woman with a Parrot* [118], painted late in Courbet's career at a time when he was having a period of fashionable success and his disciples were accusing him of compromising with conventional standards of prettiness, his innate romanticism is given full play. As an avowed realist Courbet may have painted the model very much as she looked, posed in the studio. Nevertheless, the pose is theatrical and the whole affair several steps removed from what one would expect to encounter in the course of daily events, even if it is less so than an angel with wings. The picture is full of artificialities that contradict its realism, but all contradictions are meaningless in the face of the sumptuousness of the paint, applied with such richness and vigor as to make the flesh and the gleaming torrent of chestnut hair almost tangible.

Ultimately it is in this tangibility of the image that Courbet's realism lies. In *Two Girls on the Banks of the Seine* [119], one of the most luscious paintings of the century, the weight of languid flesh is all but palpable against the cool moisture of grass and leaves; the heavy cloth and airy lace have their own existence. In the portrait of *A Spanish Woman* [120] the hand concealed in the heavy hair exists as certainly as the visible portions of the figure, because

the tangibility of the whole carries with it the feel of the palm pressed into the dark locks. This is Courbet's realism. But the mood of both pictures is romantically evocative. The dark shadows, the rich lights, the color that swells and recedes from black to brilliance, are moody and dramatic. It is a mood Courbet repeats again and again with complete independence of his subject. *Lady in a Riding Habit* (*L'Amazon*) [121] is a portrait of Louise Colet, a poetess of sorts with a spectacularly original and irritating personality. Courbet is not realist enough to present her features with objective accuracy or to explore her character; she serves him only as a figure emerging romantically from lushly romantic shadows. In his landscapes [122] Courbet goes to nature instead of fabricating a vision, but if he begins with real rocks, real streams, real trees, and real deer with their russet pelts, he ends by investing nature with an almost supernatural richness, where grottoes of foliage sink into greenish-black shadows and come forward into vitreous lights, where slabs of rock disappear from the warm sun into cool, heavy water, a nature as sensuous as flesh.

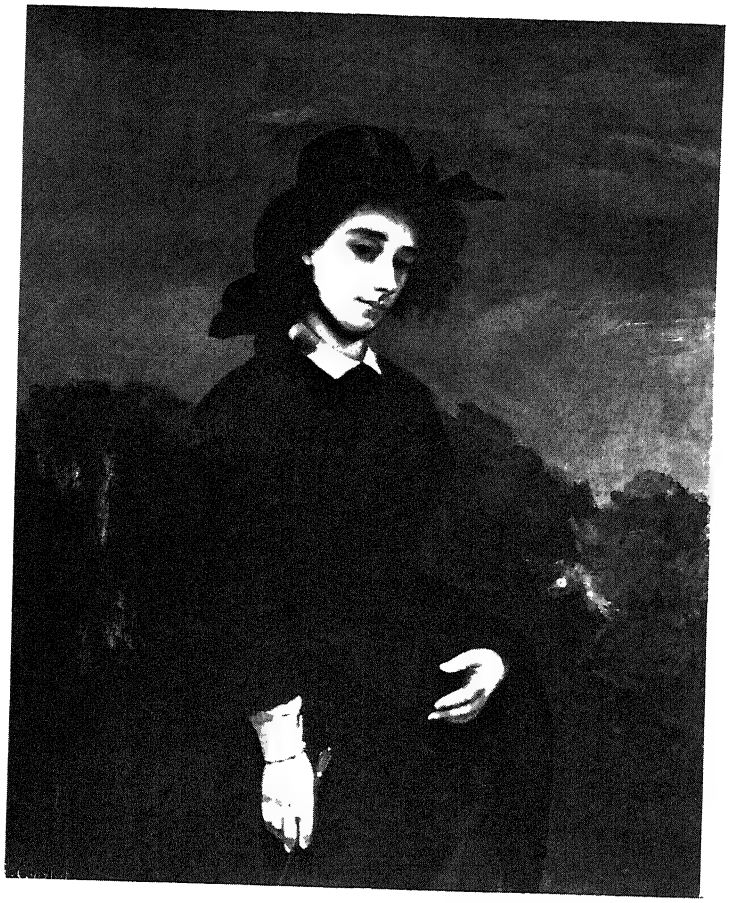
And always there is the paint, its own fat oiliness a part of the expressiveness of the painted objects. Courbet frequently applied paint with his palette knife, the thin flexible blade that is ordinarily used to mix colors on the palette. He would strike in the side of a rock with the flat of the knife, or with its tip he would flick in a sparkle of light. He painted whole pictures in this way, a technique familiar enough today, but with him an innovation.

Courbet was a natural painter. His only instruction was brief and under poor masters. He was the son of a farmer—a wealthy one—near the provincial city of Ornans, not a locality offering much opportunity for the discovery and development of a painter's talent. When he went to Paris, Courbet found his teachers on the walls of the Louvre, especially in the paintings of such seventeenth-century masters as Zurbarán, with their heavy shadows and full, rounded forms.

In effect self-trained, Courbet nevertheless had a picture accepted in the Salon of 1844, one that he had painted two years earlier when he was only twenty-three. The picture, a self-portrait with a black dog, was not much noticed. He exhibited six canvases in 1848, an exceptional year, a year of revolution, when, without a jury, the Salon was thrown open to all comers.

120. COURBET: *A Spanish Woman*, 1855. 32 x 25¾". Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.

The following year this excessive democracy was corrected; but in one of the efforts to liberalize the Salon that occurred sporadically during the century, the new government ruled that the jury be composed of painters chosen by election rather than appointed from the academic clique. This liberal jury awarded Courbet a medal for a painting called *After Dinner at Ornans*, a picture of ordinary people sitting around a table in a simple interior. Courbet also had



121. COURBET: *Lady in a Riding Habit, c.* 1856. 45½ x 35⅝". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

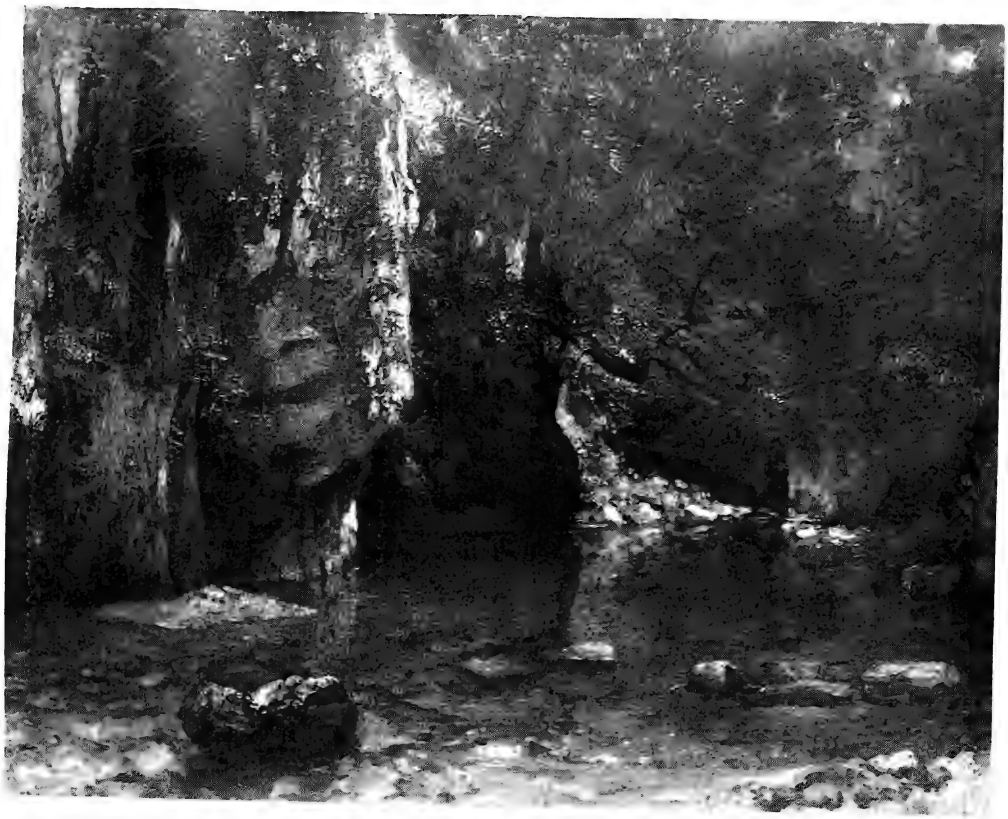
another self-portrait in this Salon, a romantically conceived painting in heavy chiaroscuro, called *The Man with the Leather Belt* [123]. Courbet was a handsome fellow, and until he became grossly fat he never tired of painting himself, always in the most admiring way. This self-adulation would be more bothersome if it were less naïve.

His early success did not last long in official circles. The Salon juries subsequent to the unusually liberal one of 1849 bitterly resented the fluke that had given a medal to this offensive intruder, and from that time on Courbet was mercilessly attacked by the Salon and reviled by conventional critics. One wonders what they might have said about Daumier (who was ten times the realist Courbet was), if he had offered the irritations to the aestheticians and the competition to the established painters that Courbet did. For Courbet became a real threat. While Daumier was painting in obscurity, Courbet was seeking recognition through a declaration of war just as the romantics had done before him, choosing the usual battlefield, the Salon, for his conquest. He was a threat to the intellectual lethargy of the average critic, who had no intention of examining new ideas when the old ones were so easy to repeat year after year, and he was a potential competitor to the conventional painters who had staked out a market in the gigantic salesroom that the Salon had become.

Courbet: His "Socialism"

When Courbet won his medal he had no theories about realism. He was painting only what it appealed to him to paint. Both *After Dinner at Ornans* and *The Man with the Leather Belt* deny Courbet's later contention that the artist "does not have the right to enlarge upon" nature, that he "trifles with it at the risk of denaturing the beautiful which exists in the most diverse forms of reality." He claimed that "Beauty as given by nature is superior to all the conventions of the artist." But of course it isn't, and in these early paintings as well as in most of his later ones the conventions of the artist serve Courbet well, not so much in the direction of his "visible and tangible world" as in the expression of some poetic mystery existing beneath it. Even *Two Girls on the Banks of the Seine,* which takes art out of the studio and puts it on a familiar river bank—reflecting the kind of life enjoyed by the new middle class with its gardens, its walks in the country, and its Sunday excursions—ends not as a representation of two young bourgeois women on the banks of the Seine but as a sensuous evocation.

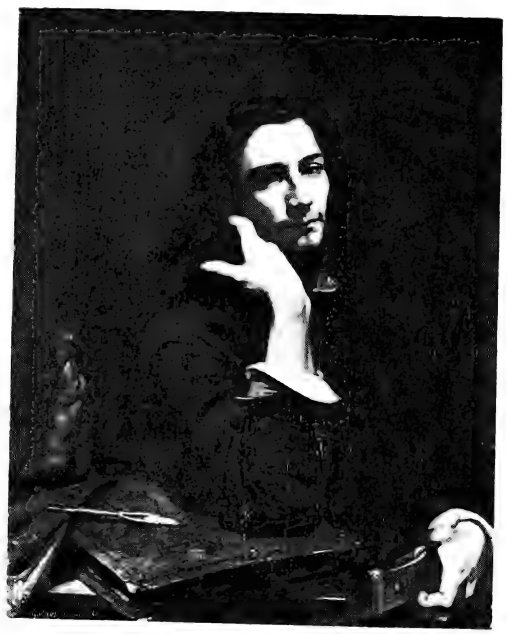
However, in certain pictures Courbet's departure from conventional subject matter and his relatively realistic treatment of it—relative in comparison with the derivative idealism making up the work of the rank and file of his contemporaries—offered some



122. COURBET: *The Grotto, c.* 1860. 25¼ x 31⅛". Baltimore Museum of Art, Cone Collection.

123. COURBET: *The Man with the Leather Belt, c.* 1844. 39½ x 32½". Louvre, Paris.

basis for the attacks that were made upon him. His trouble with the Salon began the year following his medal. Under Salon regulations any painter who had won a medal could exhibit thereafter without submitting his work to the jury. The jury of 1850, back to normal abuses, suffered from its immediate predecessor's liberality. Courbet took advantage of his position as a previous medal winner to exhibit nine pictures, including a large demonstration piece called *A Burial at Ornans* [124], showing a group of peasants and *bourgeoisie* around an open grave in the harsh countryside near his native city.



A Burial at Ornans is an impressive picture, huge, sober, richly and conscientiously painted, a prodigious technical demonstration without fireworks. It is irreproachable as a demonstration of the academic virtues of sound draughtsmanship, and it is more

124. COURBET: *A Burial at Ornans,* 1849. 123 x 261". Louvre, Paris.

than adequate as a composition. But the attacks on it were virulent. Without much question the objections were quite arbitrary, being inspired more by Courbet's personal presumptuousness than by the inherent nature of the painting. Courbet had observed the simple people around the grave most sympathetically, but for the picture to have been labeled "socialistic" for this reason seems fantastic. Nevertheless this happened, and *Stonebreakers* in the same Salon, showing a laborer and a ragged boy at this work, was given the same tag. Both subjects were unusual, and in both pictures common people were represented without the sentimentality or condescension that would have made them acceptable to Salon taste. Compared with the prettified subjects alongside them on the walls of the exhibition, Courbet's peasants seemed like brutes, and the painter's normally sympathetic attitude toward them was found to be socially and politically offensive.

Courbet enjoyed the furore, especially since he soon found admirers outside the Salon. Because the aestheticians attacked his paintings as socialism, the socialists countered by defending them as art. This confusion of values was unfortunate for Courbet. Under the influence of the socialist philosopher Pierre Joseph Proudhon, with whom he formed a friendship, Courbe began to take himself seriously as a political thinker. Labeled a socialist, he said that he was "not only socialist, but furthermore democratic and republican, in a word a partisan of all revolution and above all a realist, a sincere friend of the true truth." Such a statement sounds good at first, but it begins to fall apart when examined. Émile Zola, the realistic novelist and one of the great liberal spirits of the century, recognized Courbet's inadequacy as a social philosopher and said, "Oh, poor dear Master, Proudhon's book has left you with a case of democratic indigestion." Proudhon's book was the formulation of a theory of the social function of art that he set down in 1865, his *Du principe de l'art et de sa destination sociale.* Courbet boasted that *A Burial at Ornans* was the burial of romanticism, echoing Gros's remark that *Massacres of Scio* was the massacre of painting. He made an effort to bind his art to political theory, but the truth is that he was too much of a painter and not enough of a theorist to conceive a painting in anything but the shallowest of theoretical terms. In celebration of the appearance of his friend's book, Courbet painted a portrait of Proud-

125. COURBET: *Proudhon and His Daughters,* 1865. 66 x 78". *Petit Palais,* Paris.

hon with his two little daughters [125]. The socialist philosopher sits in a very pose-y pose, with books and manuscript near by, painted with acutely naturalistic precision. Courbet's "democratic indigestion" is paralleled in the images of this picture, where he forces his realistic theory into a literal application and produces the most artificial painting of his career.

Courbet enjoyed being in the public eye, where he remained dramatically as he continued to exhibit scot-free of the jury in successive Salons. At the 1853 Salon, Napoleon III did him the service of threatening to slash one of his paintings with a whip. Fortunately Courbet was wealthy enough not to have to depend upon selling his pictures to the Salon public, and when he did sell he sold for good prices to collectors with special tastes. His chief patron was Alfred Bruyas of Montpellier, but the Comte de Morny, a powerful dignitary of the Second Empire, was also his patron in secret. Courbet used to visit Bruyas in Montpellier, and has recorded one visit in a picture of staggering arrogance, *The Encounter,* which came to be called *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet* [126], showing the painter setting out for a day's work, posed to display his handsome bearded profile at its best, while Bruyas and a manservant address him with the subservient humility appropriate to vassals before their lord. Bruyas was not the kind of man shown here —but Courbet was.

Courbet: "The Painter's Studio"

At this time the Paris cafés were becoming more and more the meeting places for discussion and exchange of ideas between artists, as the younger ones began more and more to abandon the studios of official painters to seek out the men who were in revolt against the academic system. Courbet's special cafés were the *Brasserie des Martyrs* and the *Andler Keller,* where he

126. COURBET: *The Encounter,* 1854. 50¾ x 58½". *Musée Fabre,* Montpellier.

was surrounded by admiring students. In spite of his egotism Courbet was interested in helping young painters. He visited their studios, was patient with their requests for aid, and seems generally to have given them the stimulus that they could not find in the hidebound instruction of the official schools.

Finally in 1861 there was a minor revolt within the sacred walls, and a group of students from the Academy petitioned Courbet to teach them. In a public letter, written with the help of his literary friend Castagnary, Courbet told them that he could not consent to enter into a student–teacher relationship because each man's art was necessarily his own if it was to be of any significance. But he took advantage of the opportunity to make a statement of faith, and he did consent to the setting up of a studio to give informal criticism to the students, who would be working largely on their own. The studio was not a great success, but it produced one noteworthy sketch showing the class at work with a bull on the model stand instead of the usual nude. (The bull actually had been brought into the studio.) This was in line with the idea that realism should abandon all artificialities and deal with the coarse reality of simple things, but there is also something artificial about a bull on a model stand.

Courbet's pre-eminence as a rebel and martyr had been established a few years before this student petition. As the informally proclaimed leader of the realists, he had set about the production of a painting that would be his manifesto, standing in a corresponding position to *The Horatii* and *The Sabines* for classicism, and to *Raft of the Medusa* and *Massacres of Scio* for romanticism. The full title of the tremendous picture was *The Painter's Studio, a Real Allegory, Summarizing a Seven-year Phase of My Artistic Life* [127]. The title, and the conception of the picture, were presumptuous; Courbet never questioned for a moment that the general public would be as

interested in the man Courbet as in the theory of realism, and this egocentricity is carried out literally in the composition. The artist is seated dramatically in the middle of his picture at work on a landscape. On one side of the studio are grouped the proletarian types who had served him as subjects, while on the other are various friends and well-wishers. In detail, the allegory runs something like this:

At left: a poacher and his dog (the Hunt, a frequent subject of Courbet's) seem to look with some suspicion at a sombrero, a guitar, and a dagger (Romantic Poetry—also, elements in certain very early paintings by Courbet). A death's head lies upon a copy of the periodical *Le Journal des Débats* (the Press, and perhaps a comment on censorship, or the sterility of critical journalism). A lay figure, or artist's manikin, hangs attached to a stake (either a symbol of academic art, or a reference to paintings of the Crucifixion, or both). A vine-grower (Labor) is surrounded by figures representing types who, in Courbet's half-jelled social philosophy, prey upon the people, namely, a Jewish secondhand dealer (Commerce), a buffoon (the Theater), a priest, and a prostitute.

So much for the left. At right: in the foreground, a man and woman who represent knowledgeable art lovers; a couple embracing near the window (Love? Possibly the free love of socialist liberation); the poet and friendly critic Baudelaire, reading a book and representing the Art of Poetry.* The critic Champfleury represents Prose; Proudhon himself, who probably suggested this allegorical mish-mash, represents Social Philosophy; one Promayet, Music, and one Max Buchon, Realistic Poetry. Finally, the enlightened collector and friend Bruyas symbolizes the Maecenas upon whose patronage the arts have always depended.

As for the nude model standing behind the painter, she may represent Courbet's realistic muse, but she also fulfills the unwritten law that every demonstration piece of this kind intended for Salon exhibition must include a nude, to show the painter's mastery, and some still life, here the magnificently painted yards of cloth she holds and the objects upon it where it tumbles onto the floor. As for the admiring small boy and the cat, their allegorical function is tenuous if it exists at all.

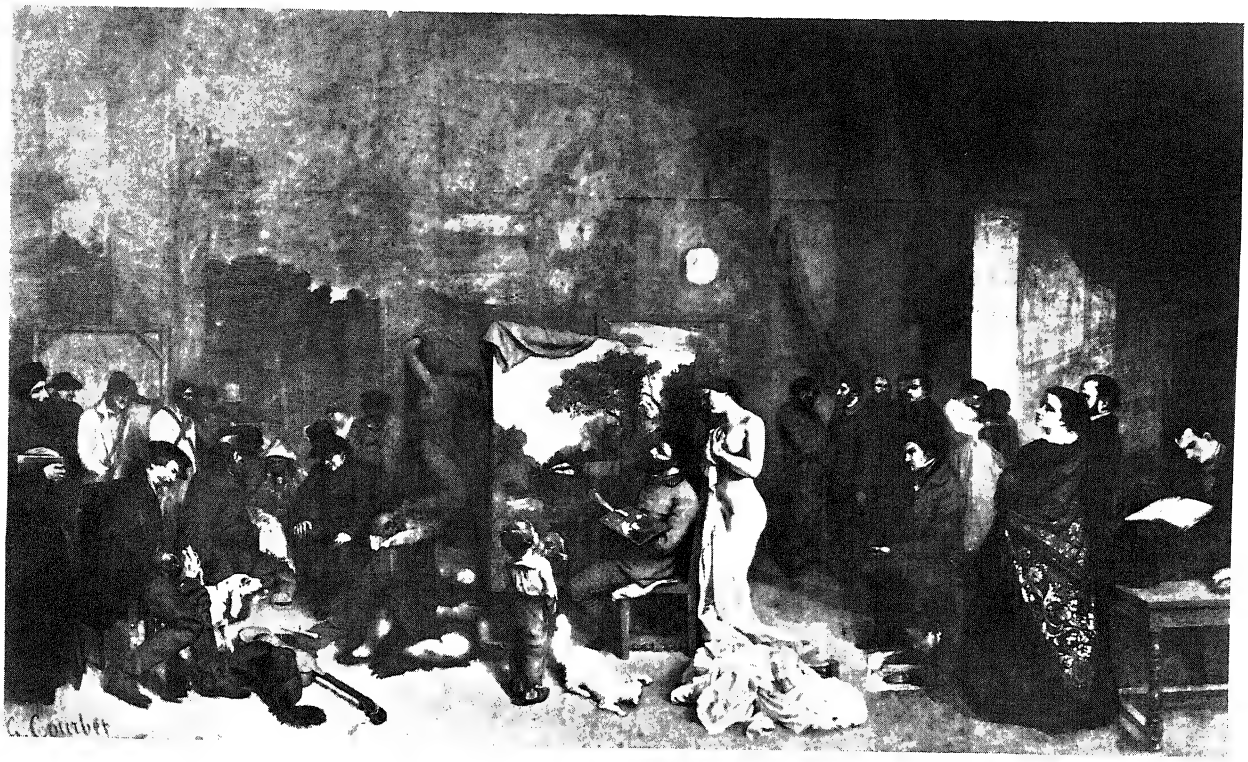
The absurdities of this rigmarole are so extreme that it would be unfair to enumerate them if Courbet's painting, as usual, did not make up for everything else. As a manifesto of realism the picture is as curious as it is as an allegory. Separate passages are only as realistic as Courbet usually was, which means that they are romantically presented. And when we add to this the unrealism of the arrangement, *The Painter's Studio* becomes a manifesto indeed—but not the one Courbet had in mind, proclaiming as it does the victory of his persistently romantic vision over his professed goal.

Courbet: The Pavilion of Realism

Courbet planned to exhibit *The Painter's Studio* along with a second showing of his first sensation, *A Burial at Ornans*, at the Exposition Universelle of 1855, one of the series of world's fairs staged in France at intervals during the century. For this Exposition the conditions of the Salon were modified. It was made international for the first time, with an international jury. The French entries were to summarize the preeminence of France in the arts, and in these special circumstances the *hors concours* ruling permitting medalists to exhibit without submitting to the jury was abrogated. Several of Courbet's entries were accepted, but *The Painter's Studio* and *A Burial at Ornans* were rejected by a jury that must have felt great elation in returning the *Burial* this time, in retaliation for Courbet's having inflicted it on an impotent jury in 1850.

The rejection of *The Painter's Studio* was especially disconcerting to Courbet, since Ingres, who had not entered a picture in the Salon for twenty years, had been induced to carry the banner for classicism with forty canvases, a retrospective of his career, while "modern" art was represented

* Baudelaire's friendly connection with Courbet did not last long. Later he referred to "the mob of vulgar artists and literary men whose shortsighted intelligence takes shelter behind the vague and obscure word Realism."



127. COURBET: *The Painter's Studio,* 1855. 141 x 234". Louvre, Paris.

by Delacroix with about the same number. Romanticism, a quarter of a century after its youthful excesses, was becoming acceptable to the general public, although again Delacroix's mysterious political affiliations may have carried some weight.

To compete with these impressive displays of idealism, Courbet decided to exhibit his rejected paintings, with others, in a special building constructed at his own expense, which he called the Pavilion of Realism. David had made a small fortune through private exhibition of *The Sabines,* and so had Géricault with the *Raft of the Medusa,* but Courbet's Pavilion of Realism was a fiasco. It attracted so few visitors that he did not even recover its costs, a hard blow in itself but not nearly so hard as the humiliating implication of public indifference. The Pavilion of Realism was deserted during most of the Exposition, but its unhappy entrepreneur might have taken some comfort if he could have read an entry in the journal of one distinguished visitor. "I went to see Courbet's exhibition," Delacroix wrote. "There alone for nearly an hour. I discovered a masterpiece in his rejected picture. I couldn't tear myself away from it. They have refused, there, one of the most extraordinary works of our time."

And of course Delacroix was right. *The Painter's Studio* is an extraordinary picture and a fine one. Its pretentious allegorical nonsense is not important. When all is said and done, Courbet remains here, as in all his work, a pure painter in spite of his theorizing and his politicking. The art of David is richer after we know it as a demonstration of a theory of art and a statement of social dedication. The more we know about Delacroix's aesthetics and his technical processes the more we find in his pictures. But with Courbet it is the reverse. His professed realism and his professed socialism are worse than no help at all in enjoying his art; they would actually stand in the way if we had to consider them, but fortunately we do not.

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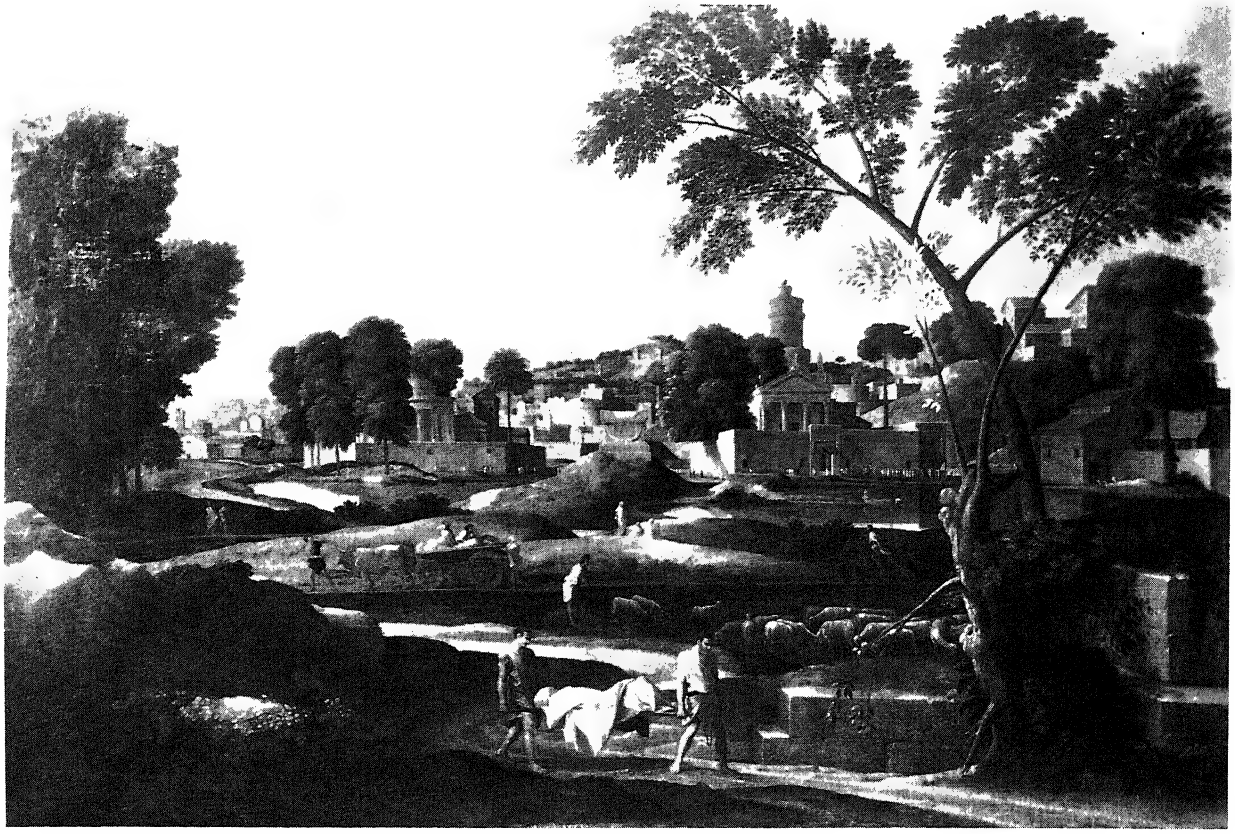


128. Poussin: *The Funeral of Phocion,* 1648. 46¾ x 70½". Louvre, Paris.

Courbet was a painter-born, with neither Delacroix's intellect nor David's shrewdness. But beyond either of these men he had a capacity for responding to the everyday world, a talent of such strength that when his brush was in his hand his theories about art and society dropped away and left him purely and simply in the only capacity in which he was without question great and sure of his ground: great and sure of his ground as a man with a full-blooded love of sensuous experience and a painter who translated his world into corresponding images.

Courbet's world was a place where the literal reality of things—peasants at a funeral, deer in the green depths of a woods, a snow field, the sea, baskets of flowers, two girls lying on the grassy banks of a river—is identical with his unanalytical response to them. This response is not a complicated one but it is always present. He responds to the human warmth of simple people, to the cool secrecy of the woods and the rich waxy pelts of the deer, to the breadth of the sea or a river and the heavy sheen of its water or the tumbling foam of waves, to the opulence of healthy flesh and the heaviness of a coil of hair, to cloths and laces. In front of his paintings we need no theory, aesthetic or political, to derive the fullest satisfactions they have to offer. We are reminded of the wisest thing Courbet ever said: "There can be no schools; there are only painters."

Courbet's career, and his life, ended in a footnote beginning with the promise of glory and ending in exile. His Salon medal had coincided almost exactly with the election of Louis Napoleon as first president of the Second Republic, and the twenty years of his reign (as Napoleon III after 1852) were the great years of Courbet's life as a painter. In March, 1871, after the humiliating defeat of the Franco-Prussian War, the population of Paris rose against the

government, and for a while it appeared that in the ensuing Commune Courbet was to be what David had been just after the Revolution. Suddenly his overpublicized socialism was not a liability but a recommendation, and he was elected to the body of representatives of the people, made president of an assembly of artists, and put at the head of a commission to safeguard the Louvre and other national art treasures. As David had done almost a hundred years before, Courbet now abolished the school of the Academy, as well as the Academy in Rome, and did away with Salon medals.

But these "reforms" lasted no time at all. The Commune ended in May, and reprisals began. Courbet was sentenced to prison, and after several months there he was removed to a nursing home. He was an aging man now, ill and, for the first time, defeated. During the rioting of the Commune a national monument, the Colonne Vendôme, had been wrecked. It was—and is—a giant column designed after the model of ancient Roman commemorative columns, a neo-classical tribute to Napoleon. Courbet, the anticlassicist, had once said that it should be torn down. Whether or not he had anything to do with its destruction is not certain, but he was ordered to pay the costs of its repair and re-erection. Even for Courbet, who was still a wealthy man, this was impossible. He managed to escape to Switzerland, where he died six years later.

The State of Landscape

While the partisans of Ingres, Delacroix, and Courbet were carrying on their three-cornered debate in the studios in Paris, something new was happening in the countryside near the capital. Easels were beginning to sprout among the woods, in the fields, and along the banks of rivers. For the first time, French painters were taking natural landscape seriously.

Landscape painting as the more-or-less accurate reflection of a specific scene from nature hardly existed (in France) before the second quarter of the nineteenth century. There were souvenir paintings of famous views, and occasional exceptions, such as David's view of the Luxembourg Gardens painted from the window of the room where he was imprisoned, but there was not a landscape tradition as landscape is generally thought of today, having to do with trees, streams, hills, clouds, and other components of nature in their natural combinations. A literary gentleman-collector named Deperthes, in the eighteenth century, summed up the attitude toward landscape pretty well when he defined it as "the art of composing sites after choosing the most beautiful and the most noble elements offered by nature." Deperthes warned that "If the study of nature is indispensable, it should be considered nothing more than a secondary means in a type of painting which, if it is to be properly accomplished, demands above all the inventive skill and the purity of taste which alone can give order to the inspirations of genius."

The countryside in its uncorrected state was not very highly thought of. It was accidental, unorganized, and impure. Gardens were formal; the obvious thing to do with a tree was to line it up with other trees and trim the whole row into a common shape. In his studio the painter worked in much the same way, without the uniformity but with just as much artificiality in the creation of ideal shapes from natural ones. Landscape was synthesized from harmonized trees, perfected hills, well-disciplined streams, and generic clouds. The landscape painter's job was to organize these elements into compositions of purity, nobility, serenity, and perfect proportion. This is classicism, of course. Classical landscape was idealized; it was structural; it was heroic—a fitting counterpart to the figures of gods and heroes created in much the same way.

Such landscape may fall easily into the familiar traps of the classical style: monotony, sterility, and decorative formula. But it need not do so. The finest classical landscape ever painted is probably *The Funeral of Phocion* [128] by the Academy's seventeenth-century god Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665). (If it is not the finest, then some other one of Poussin's is.) It is an extremely complicated picture, but from its complication all confusion, agitation, and

uncertainty have been removed. Each of its elements—and there must be hundreds of them—is conceived less as a tree, or a branch, or a wall, or a figure, or a building or a piece of cloth or a cart, than as an abstract form that must be adjusted to take its place in balance with all the other forms in the composition.

The satisfactions to be found in *The Funeral of Phocion* have nothing to do with the pleasures to be found in nature. Neither may much interest be looked for in its nominal subject. Phocion was an Athenian general who was unjustly convicted and executed for treason, and the picture shows his sheeted body being carried beyond the city walls to unsanctified ground. But the painter is not interested in telling the story or making a parable. The subject is of incidental, less than incidental, importance. The picture's title may be *The Funeral of Phocion* but its real subject is Order. The satisfaction to be derived from it comes from the contemplation of this order in its perfection, its serenity, its abstract clarity from which all confusion, accident, and impurity has been distilled.

But we have already seen that for the romantic soul perfect order was not enough. Or, rather, it was the wrong thing. The romantic responded to nature in its untrammeled aspects, seeing trees, streams, flowers, birds, clouds, the wind, the rain, and the simple people living close to these things, as manifestations of the vague, universal mystery toward which the romantic spirit yearns for emotional fulfillment. When this yearning was most intense it demanded turbulent aspects of nature to satisfy it, even menacing ones. "Arise, ye desired storms!" was a familiar romantic cry. Nothing could be too big or too disorderly—crags in disarray, wild valleys, tempests, cataclysms—or too exotic.

This emotionalized landscape, too, was conjured up in the studio, and it too had a tradition as old as that of classical landscape. As a single example, *The Cemetery* [129] by Jacob van Ruisdael (1628–1682) is filled with storm clouds, a rainbow, shattered trees, unruly water, a ruined abbey, with mysterious dark recesses and sudden spectral lights. And it is, of course, as carefully and as artificially a concocted landscape as is *The Funeral of Phocion.*

The new landscapists who fled the studios for the countryside were thoroughly sympathetic to the classical idea that landscape painting involved problems of composition, a balanced disposition of the forms within the picture space. They were even more sympathetic to the idea that nature was full of emotional connotations which it was the painter's privilege to reveal. But they subjugated both these ideas to a third: they believed that any fragment of nature as it existed, even the most familiar and commonplace bit of field, river bank, or forest, was a legitimate subject for a work of art that could be intellectually satisfying without classical artificialities, and emotionally expressive without recourse to the usual romantic stimulants.

There was some precedent for this way of feeling also, in England. English painters were already at work from something like the same point of view, and in seventeenth-century Holland there had been similar development along with romantic examples, such as the one we have just seen.* The Frenchmen drew freely from both sources without imitating either. The important point historically is that these were Frenchmen introducing a concept of nature altogether radical to the tradition of French landscape, a concept that was to become the dominant one during the next seventy years when French painters were setting new directions for the art of all the Western world.

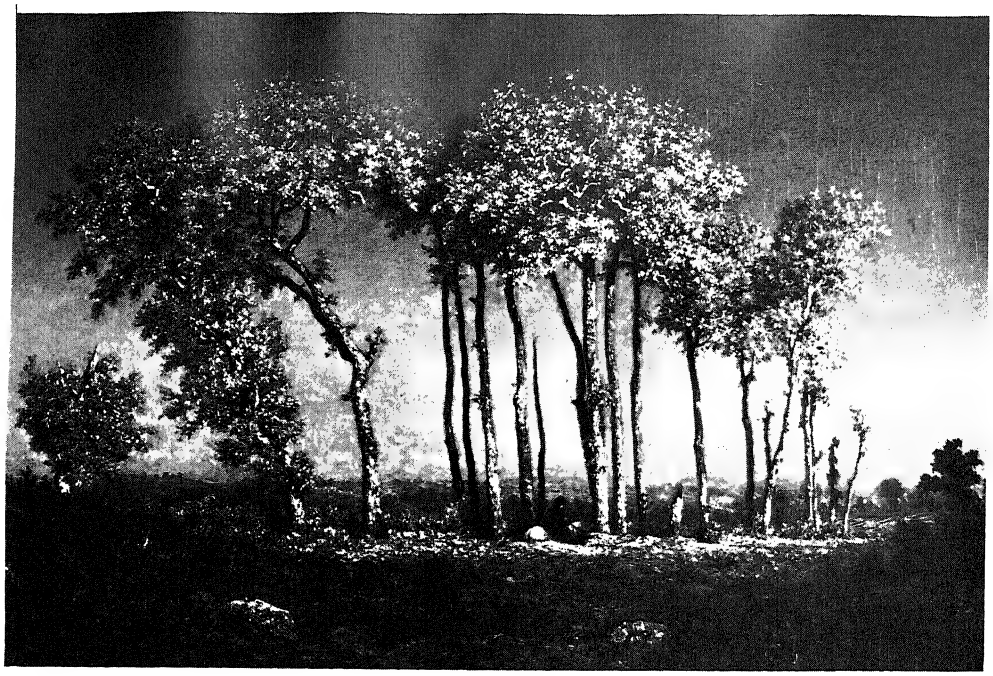
* The English painters receive their due later on in this book. One of them, Constable, with *The Hay Wain* [313] of the 1824 Salon, has already been mentioned in connection with Delacroix. As for the Hollanders, it is conventional to point out that the bourgeois origin of their seventeenth-century school of realistic landscape corresponds to the bourgeois origin of the French painting about to be discussed here. This is true, with the difference that the Dutch landscapes were part of a movement in painting stimulated by the Dutch love of things the good burghers proudly treasured—their houses full of possessions, their countryside, and themselves. This was less true in nineteenth-century France. As a broad statement of the difference: the Dutch landscapes are records of fact, while the French ones are records of responses to fact.

129. RUISDAEL: *The Cemetery, c.* 1660. 56 x 74¼". Detroit Institute of Arts.

Barbizon: Rousseau, Dupré, Diaz

One of the centers for the painters who began to flee Paris to discover nature was Barbizon, a picturesque village on the edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau not far from Paris. The Forest of Fontainebleau is one of those neat, gracious woods never for a moment to be confused with a wilderness and seldom suggesting anything more savage than the upper reaches of Central Park. But it afforded vistas where the hand of rational man was as inconspicuous as it is allowed to be anywhere in France. And near the forest there were fields, peasants, and peasant cottages, which interested some of the painters, as well as chickens, ducks, and cattle, which held an unreasonable fascination for others of them. The Barbizon painters were not formally organized into a "movement," but the name of the village has attached itself to a dozen or so landscapists and painters of peasants or animals, of whom several spent a great deal of time there. Others made occasional visits and still others worked elsewhere but in the same spirit.

The spirit is best classified as romantic-realistic. As realists the Barbizon painters made direct reference to nature and even worked directly in its presence with respectful attention to the actual disposition of its forms. It is difficult to make this sound like much of an innovation, today when everyone's idea of a landscape painter is an artist at an easel set out in the open air, but an innovation it was. Even Courbet ordinarily fabricated his landscapes indoors (as he shows himself doing in *The Painter's Studio*), although he made sketches for them out of doors (as he shows himself setting out to do in *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet*). His advice to young painters was to work from nature "even if from a dunghill." The Barbizon painters had been working from nature for years, being somewhat older than Courbet. And being much more temperate they were not interested in

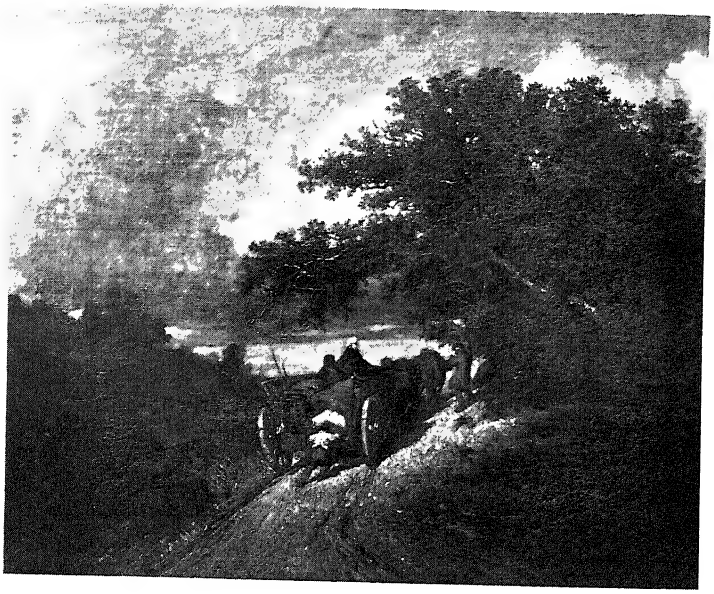


130. T. Rousseau: *Under the Birches*, 1842. 16⅝ x 25⅝". Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur J. Secor.

dunghills. As romantic-realists they were interested not only in the look of nature but in discovering its "moods," the "spirit" of trees and fields and skies, "the oak wrestling with the rock," one of them said. But the mood was always discovered within the subject; the subject was never violated to serve the mood. Even when the final picture was to be painted in the studio, as it usually was, the painter subjected himself to the discipline of preliminary study out of doors, working closely within the bounds of the subject's physical identity.

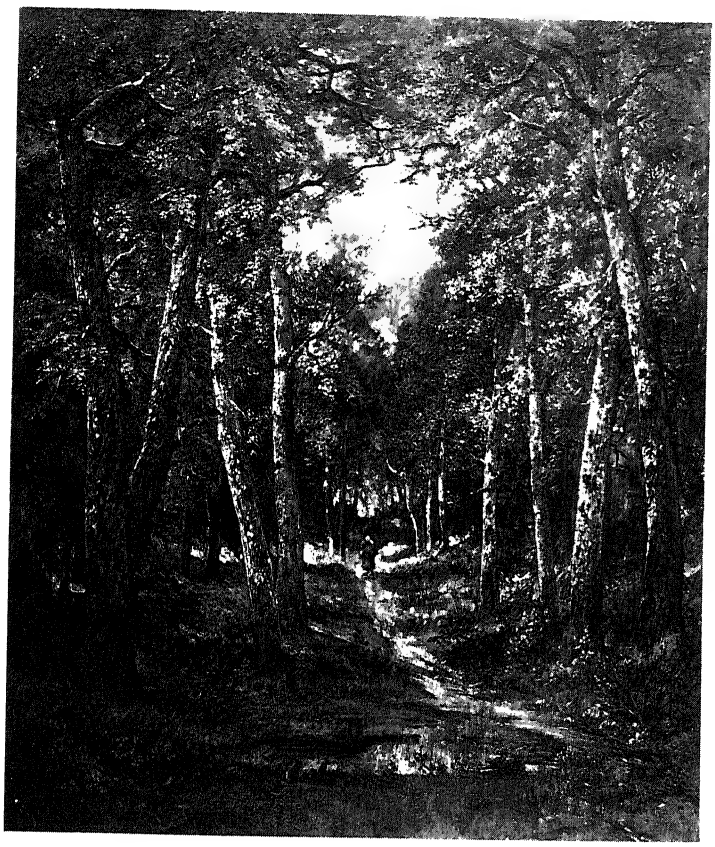
These Barbizon painters were hard at work between 1830 and 1840. At first the going was difficult, upstream against the opposition of the Academy. For a while they were castigated as vulgar, but eventually most of them were accepted in the Salons and even won medals. On the whole they were quiet, unobtrusive men, and since landscape was a secondary art their deviations from the academic norm were less offensive than they would have been in the usual demonstration paintings. By the 1850's these artists were beginning to have successes they continued to enjoy during the rest of their lifetimes while the Academy found its whipping boy in Courbet. By the end of the century, after their deaths, their vogue was tremendous, and they became stars of the international salesrooms, being collected with particular avidity in America. Their success—and while they were alive—was speeded by the aesthetic perception and the business perspicacity of a remarkable dealer named Georges Durand-Ruel (1864–1931).

In retrospect we see that it was the misfortune of the Barbizon painters to have laid so excellent a foundation for so exceptional a generation of painters—the impressionists who followed them—that their own work has suffered by comparison. By the 1920's their paintings were being pushed to less conspicuous places on museum walls, and today they have become more than anything else a storage problem. A few examples are given exhibition space as historical fillers; certain atypical paintings, on the contrary, are much sought after, for reasons that will become apparent shortly.



131. Dupré: *The Hay Wagon,* date unknown. 14¼ x 18⅛". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Wolfe Bequest.

132. Diaz: *Forest Path,* date unknown. 28 x 23¾". Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.



In the meanwhile, three typical Barbizon painters will do very well to represent the school: Théodore Rousseau (1812–1867), Jules Dupré (1811–1889), and Narcisse Virgile Diaz de la Peña (1807–1876). A fourth, Constant Troyon (1810–1865) made such a success in the Salon that he is taken up in the next chapter which discusses the state of that institution at mid-century.

Of the three, Rousseau is the most rewarding after continued acquaintance. He combines a sense of the monumentality of landscape with a passion for its individual forms amounting to nature worship. He is so impressed with nature as a force that every irregularity in the growth of a tree, every blade of green that springs from the earth, every cloud that scuds busily across the sky, has for him its own vigorous life as part of a purposeful scheme full of growth and activity. He sees no need to inject romantic folderol into nature because to conceal or change any part of the natural miracle would be only to weaken it. He sees no need to put it into classical order because he feels a more powerful order behind the growth of things, the turn of the seasons, the rising or setting of the sun [130]. He painted images of this cycle of omnipotent force as men have always painted images of their gods, but he did not have to fabricate an image because it was everywhere for him to see. Mystery, revery, and philosophical explanation are only incidental to his perception of the miracle around him. The miracle was tangible, self-explanatory. He accepted it at face value and gloried in it. He was a great bearded fellow—untrimmed beards were cultivated by the Barbizon painters along with other aspects of nature in its pure state—and the suave academicians enjoyed regarding him as an oaf. But during the 1850's he attained the general popularity of the school, and Salon success as well. He was not a commuting landscapist; he spent most of his life at Barbizon, and died there.

Rousseau's pantheism, for that is what it amounted to, was a kind of poetry, but it is doubtful whether the public who admired his landscapes were aware of this quality beneath the literal "picture of

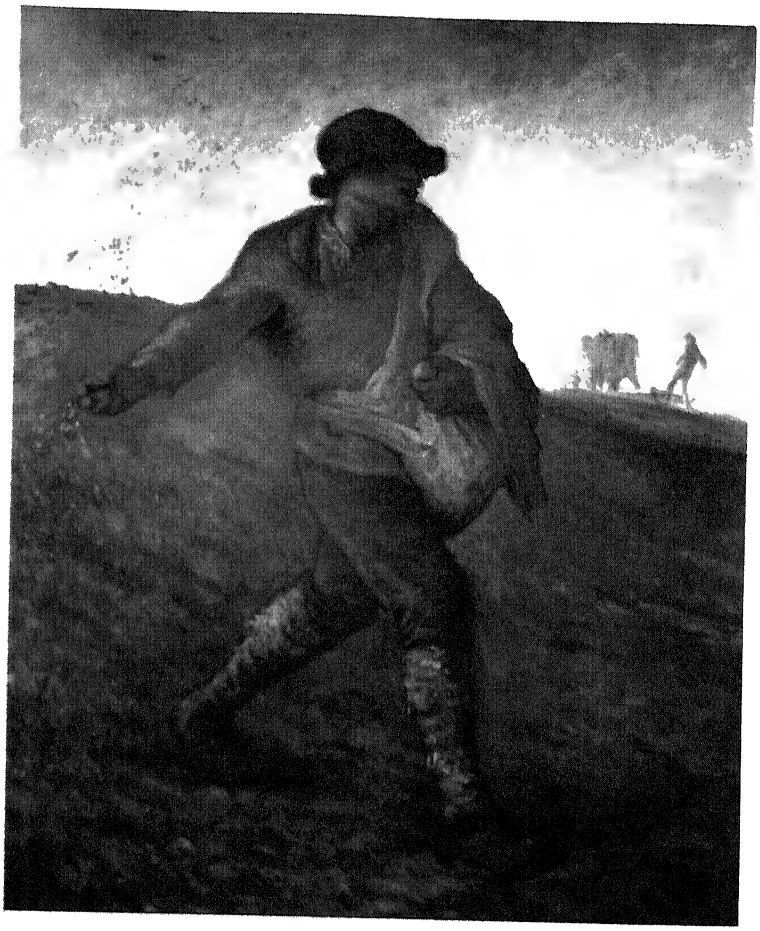
133. DAUBIGNY: *River and Bridge,* date unknown. 10½ x 17⅜". Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.

something" painted with a high degree of objective accuracy which they spontaneously respected. Poetry of a more obvious kind was cultivated by Jules Dupré [131]. He was closer to the romantic tradition than Rousseau was. (Delacroix spoke kindly of him.) He had a great enthusiasm for the English landscapists, who were also romantics who found poetry in simple aspects of the countryside. Dupré's mood, however, is more introspective than the cheerful English one. Individually his paintings are often effective in their hint of romantic pathos within the heart of nature, but he is repetitious, and after a while one suspects that his mood was continued as his trademark after it became a good thing on the market.

Narcisse Diaz is even more conventionally romantic. In fact he falls outside the realistic half of the romantic-realist classification suitable to the school as a whole. His pictures are frankly concoctions, his most typical ones being of small, secluded clearings in the forest from which the observer looks through the broken silhouettes of leaves and branches as if from a shadowed room or a grotto, at patches of light sky or open fields beyond [132]. Occasionally these leafy cubicles are inhabited by human beings, by ideal figures such as nymphs in white robes, or even by mythological characters. It is a pleasant formula although Diaz forced it a little.

Daubigny

The truest poet of the group was neither Dupré nor Diaz, but Charles-François Daubigny (1817–1878), who discovered poetry within his subjects instead of grafting it onto them. It is a simple poetry, as direct as it is sensitive; there is never anything dramatic or high-flown about it. Daubigny's love of nature is at the opposite pole from Rousseau's fervent adoration of it. He contemplates quiet skies, gentle rivers, level, eventless fields, in calm light. Rousseau clutched with obsessed intensity upon every natural detail: the leaf was as important as the tree; he was reluctant to forego the joy of representing each blade of grass in a field. His problem was to capture the monumentality of the whole through the enumeration of an infinite number of parts.



134. MILLET: *The Sower*, 1850. 41¾ x 33". Provident Tradesmen's Bank and Trust Company, Philadelphia.

135. MILLET: *The Gleaners*, 1857. 33 x 44". Louvre, Paris.

Daubigny, instead, begins with the acceptance of wholeness. There is a kind of wisdom in the breadth of his vision, its calmness, its perception of the unity of natural objects which rises above their complication. His landscape is intimate and domesticated. Farm cottages rest in his countryside as naturally and as peacefully as the shrubs and trees that have grown there; so do the small stone bridges of France and the boats on the full, quiet streams [133]. Alone among the Barbizon painters Daubigny worked entirely out of doors, even adopting a little canopied rowboat as a floating studio in order to paint the banks of the river across a placid stretch of water. He loved the cool river light impregnating fresh moist air, the gentle sobriety of small farms and quiet fields in early morning or evening light. These observations, made and recorded in the open air, place Daubigny historically as the most important of the Barbizon painters; of them all, he made the most valuable contribution to the next generation, to an extent that is only beginning to be fully recognized.

As a mine for imitators, the landscape tradition of the Barbizon painters has yielded some of the most inane pictures ever turned out by commercial hacks. Their work has been deformed into countless pretty picturesque scenes of the kind used on scenic calendars, pasted on wastebaskets, and cut up for jigsaw puzzles. The resemblances of these superficial imitations are close enough to the originals to have clouded our perception of the unobtrusive virtues of the Barbizon school.

Millet

The history of art is full of drastic re-evaluations, especially in our time which is so full of shifts and upheavals and variety in points of view. Painters are especially vulnerable during the century after their death, and the reputation of Jean-François Millet (1814–1875) has tobogganed in recent years from a point high enough to make his descent very swift. A short generation ago sepia reproductions of three of his

pictures, *The Sower* [134], *The Gleaners* [135], and *The Angelus* [136] hung in every classroom and Sunday school. They are typical of Millet's most ambitious work with their peasant figures generalized into large, semisculpturesque forms dominating the foreground of a deep landscape, thrown into grander-than-life eminence against the sky, meant to be symbolical of man's union with the earth. But Millet's noble poor seem a little self-conscious of their symbolical importance, a little too cleaned up to smack convincingly of the soil of which they are supposed to be an emanation. That this should be so today is striking evidence of how taste can reverse itself, since the objections to Millet during his lifetime, objections that were violent, were on the opposite score. "This is the painting of men who don't change their linen, who want to intrude themselves upon gentlemen; this art offends me and disgusts me." The speaker was a snob,* but it is still rather sad that Millet should have suffered so during his life on one score and should be discarded later on for the opposite reason.

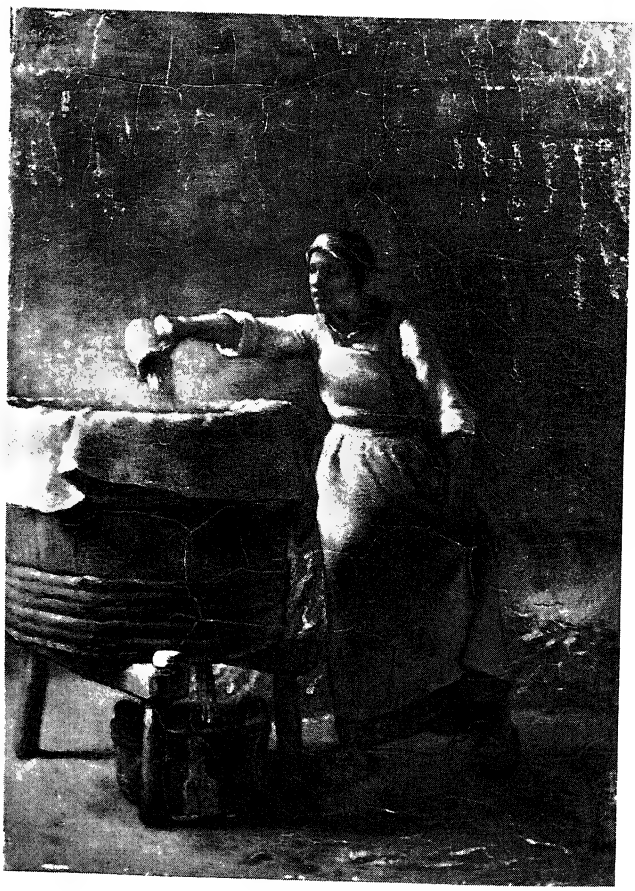
The generations between Millet's death and his current fall from favor admired him as a painter who had achieved the ultimate statement of the nobility of the simple man, that idea begun so long ago and adapted to such a variety of expressions. The most successful example of Millet's variety was *The Sower*, which he repeated many times. The peasant is recognizable as one of Michelangelo's naked titans, descended from the Sistine ceiling, put into rough clothes, and given a bag of grain—a disconcerting blunder of miscasting. But if this initial hurdle is cleared, we see that the figure has considerable power, its gesture is a wide, generous one, harmonious with its amplitude and its symbolism.

The Sower symbolizes the turn of the seasons, the cycle of growth, fruition, and return to the soil. It may suffer in comparison with Daumier's *Soup*, but we condescend too easily to Millet. There are dozens of virtually unknown Millets, such as *The Bleaching Tub* [137], to rebuke us.

* The same Count de Nieuwerkerke, Director of Fine Arts, who refused to look at Delacroix's St. Sulpice murals.

136. MILLET: *The Angelus*, 1857–59. 21¾ x 26". Louvre, Paris.

137. MILLET: *The Bleaching Tub*, *c.* 1861. 17¼ x 13". Louvre, Paris.



138. MILLET: *The Quarriers,* date unknown. 29 x 23½". Toledo Museum of Art, Gift of Arthur J. Secor.

Here the breadth and solidity of the forms, without derivative reference, and the drama of the light are uncloyed by sentimental values. The abstract values of painting—formal relationships for their own sake—are at least as important here as are representational ones, and the representation is uncluttered by the pretentious anecdotal overlay that mars so much of Millet's work. And in an occasional atypical picture, *The Quarriers* [138] for example, Millet is suddenly released from the efforted and naïve solemnity he so often imposed upon himself and paints instead with assurance and fervor in forms of dramatic strength reminded of Daumier at his best.

Millet's failures came when he overreached himself and were inherent in his personality. He was the son of a farmer—but not, like Courbet, of a prosperous one—and was only well enough educated to envy the condition of being a gentleman without having the means to turn himself into one. Nor had he the perception to recognize that it was not important for him to be one. He became stiff and forbidding, belonging nowhere. Young painters found him difficult to approach, although certainly he must have been hungry for the appreciation they were ready to offer. Although his pictures were accepted by the Salon, after his debut in 1847 with a classical subject, his tepid successes did not counteract the sting of harsh criticisms. He avoided Paris (no doubt because he could not afford to live there in the manner he thought he should), and he and Rousseau were the only two of the Barbizon group to settle in the village permanently. Altogether he had a difficult life. He was an honest man whose art was essentially traditional, was called radical, and now seems sentimental because he is best known by his second-best pictures.

Corot: His Popular Success

The best of the Barbizon painters are excellent men who would be difficult to include in a list of the great masters of painting. Their associate Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (1796–1875) would be difficult to omit. Since he is not a classifiable painter, Corot is always grouped with the Barbizon school because he did some work out of doors, had certain affinities with the Barbizon spirit in some of his work, and knew and was sympathetic to the Barbizon men. He belonged to an older generation, having been born in the eighteenth century, three years before Delacroix and only seven years after the Revolution. He painted just as he pleased, propounding no set of theories in opposition to others, making no belligerent pronouncements, living the eighty years of his life so quietly and painting so modestly that it is always a surprise to discover how much influence he exerted. As an isolated instance, he was on the liberal Salon jury of 1849, the one that awarded the medal to the unknown Courbet for his *After*

139. COROT: *Souvenir de Mortefontaine*, 1864. 25¼ x 34½". Louvre, Paris.

140. DAUMIER: *Corot Sketching at Ville d'Avray, c.* 1854–56. Wash drawing, 12½ x 9½". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

Dinner at Ornans to the embarrassment of subsequent juries. He was fifty years old before his own father, a prosperous merchant, realized that there was a serious painter in the family. In that year Corot was awarded the Legion of Honor, and for the first time his father stopped saying apologetically that "Camille amuses himself with painting" and said, "Well, since they have decorated Camille, he must have talent," as neat a statement as could be invented to summarize the bourgeois attitude toward aesthetic achievement.

At nineteen Corot was working in the family's business, his father having refused to give him the money to study art. Later he was given the allowance that had been allotted to a poor relation who had died, and he lived thus until his pictures began to sell, which they did when he was well along in middle age. There seems to have been no serious conflict within the family. If there were conflicts or upheavals of any kind in Corot's life, they left no mark on

141. COROT: *View at Narni,* 1826–27. 28 x 38". National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

his work. He never married and seems never even to have been in love.

The pictures that began to sell so tardily were not his best ones. But they are still the ones best known and much loved by a wide public; they are also the ones connecting him most closely with the Barbizon school. Bad prints of his *Souvenir de Mortefontaine* [139], typical of the manner that brought him into popularity and kept him there for decades, used to hang on every other living-room wall. Fluffy trees, some grasses and shrubs flecked here and there with bits of light, a sweet body of quiet water, a mild sky, and a few small, graceful figures are combined and recombined in these pictures, painted as if seen through a cool haze. They are minor lyrics of great sweetness and tenderness, overfamiliar, and weak and obvious in comparison with Corot's best work. But they are lovely pictures and need not be rejected just because they give pleasure to so many people.

Popular success came to Corot during the 1850's. The Emperor purchased one of his poetic landscapes, *Souvenir de Marcoussis,* from the banner Salon of 1855, not as official patronage but because he liked it. Dealers were quick to add snob value to a product that had already begun to find purchasers on the strength of its popular attraction. For the rest of his life Corot could sell as many of these pictures as he was willing to paint—more, in fact, and his pictures were forged by the hundreds. There is a story that when one poverty-stricken forger was suspected and forced to go to Corot with the picture he was offering as an original, Corot signed the forgery for him. This should not be true, but it is not out of character. Corot gave money to many artists, good or bad, who needed it. It has already been mentioned that he deeded over a country cottage to the aging and destitute Daumier, who left an affectionate record of Corot sketching at Ville d'Avray [140], a locality near Paris where Corot found many of his most intimate subjects.

Corot could have made a fortune if he had wanted to. He did make a great deal of money, which he did not need. His tastes were simple and he had been perfectly happy on his allowance. In the meanwhile, along with the pictures that were clamored for, he continued to paint the kind of pictures he liked best himself.

142. COROT: *Bridge and Castle of St. Angelo with Cupola of St. Peter's,* 1826–27. 10½ x 17". California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco.

Corot and the Tradition of Landscape

Long before he hit upon his popular style, Corot was painting landscapes of an opposite solidity and definition. They are the first entirely legitimate descendants of Poussin's classical tradition after two centuries of great admiration and partial understanding. They are also among the forerunners of the modern movement, making Corot a bridge between tradition and revolution.

Corot's connection with Poussin [128] is most apparent in early pictures, such as *View at Narni* [141], where he takes an actual scene but idealizes it along Poussinesque lines. The connection is less apparent but goes deeper in pictures where he holds himself more closely to the actual appearance of the subject yet invests it with Poussin's monumental calm. As examples, his views of Rome (Rome especially, although he did similar cityscapes elsewhere) respect objective fact with deceptive literalness. Buildings and hills are disposed approximately as they actually existed [142, 143], not juggled about at will, yet their formal relationships are as satisfying as those in a Poussin where all the forms are invented and arbitrarily combined.*

How did Corot manage to impose this perfect order on forms that in reality were combined by chance? Rome is a magnificent welter of structures and gardens, punctuated at random with some superbly organized vistas, but Corot did not choose these readymade compositions as subjects. Over-all, Rome is a hodgepodge of streets and buildings that have grown partly with-

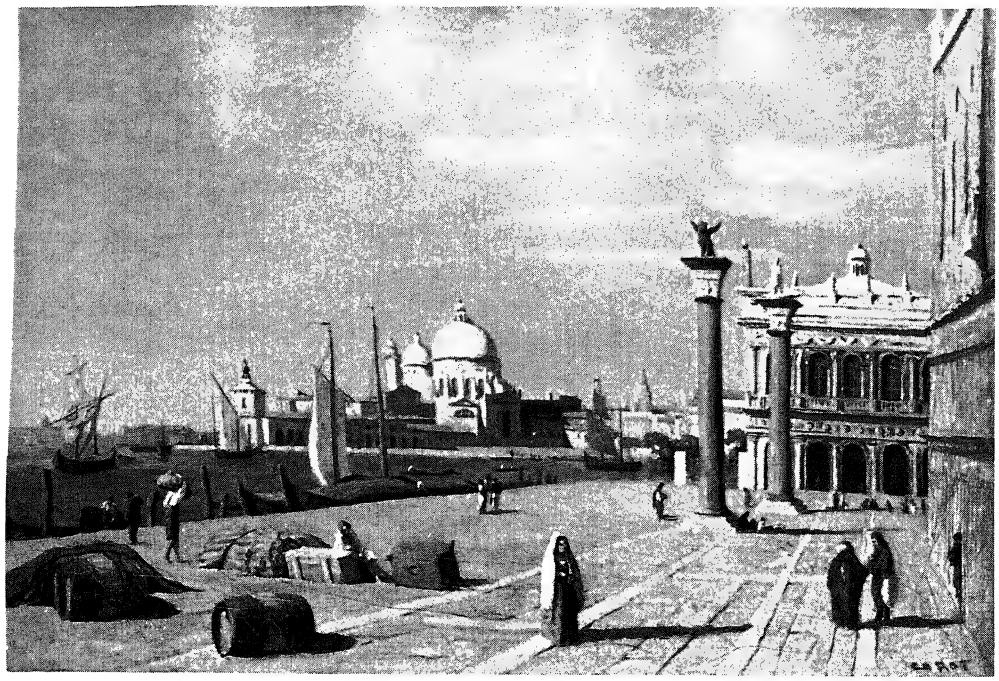
* For purposes of completeness it has to be pointed out that Poussin's tradition as observed by Corot includes reference to the art of Poussin's contemporary, Claude Lorrain. But this is an unnecessary detour for getting to the main point. Lorrain's poetic devices may be echoed in *View at Narni* and are obvious in Corot's late, soft style. But Lorrain would never have painted as Corot does in the views of Rome. It is possible to imagine Poussin doing so.

143. COROT: *View of the Farnese Gardens,* 1826. 9½ x 15¾". Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

out plan and partly according to a series of plans that interrupt and compete with one another. Corot takes views of this welter and brings them into classical order without appearing to depart from an approximation of photographic reality.

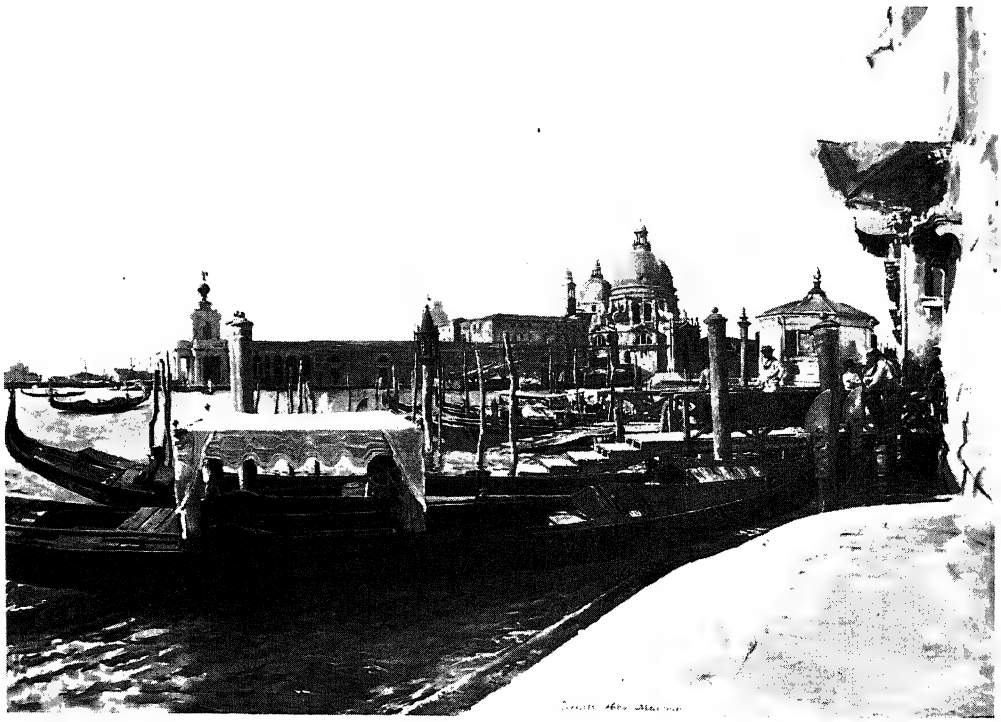
As an explanation of how he went about doing this, his own statement "Form and value—there are the essentials" tells everything and nothing. Form and value are part of the jargon of any tenth-rate painter. Corot's words tell us nothing we cannot see for ourselves, that like every painter working from nature he begins with the raw material presented by the forms and values as they exist, and makes his own adjustments of their relationships to achieve his own variation on the theme of the visible world. Thousands of painters do this, with varying degrees of technical skill. Some of the worst are more highly developed technicians than Corot was. But very few of them enlarge or clarify our experience. Certain of Corot's adjustments are apparent to anyone. He avoids strong value contrasts, sticking to the middle range of half tones. He mutes color similarly. If it were possible to superimpose a photograph of the scene over one of his paintings, his variations from actual proportions and dispositions would not be extreme. But slight or great, they put the subject into order.

In this respect it may be illuminating to compare Corot's transmutation of a specific scene, a view of the Church of Santa Maria della Salute seen from across the Grand Canal in Venice [144] with the same subject as treated by one of the most commonplace spirits among nineteenth-century painters, the academician J. L. E. Meissonier [145]. One of the most successful painters of the day, Meissonier is the subject of more detailed comments later on in this book. He was a painter without technical limitations and equally without depth or sensitivity. The painting under consid-



144. COROT: *View of the Quay of the Schiavoni, Venice,* 1834. 12¼ x 11⅝". National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, Felton Bequest.

145. MEISSONIER: *View of Venice,* 1888. Louvre, Paris.



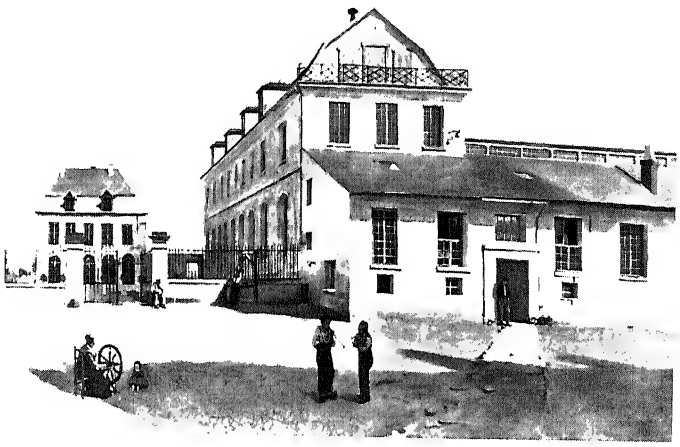
eration here is a muddle of gondolas, mooring masts, lanterns, water, and architecture, all painted with bright facility and a high degree of representational accuracy. From detail to detail Meissonier's collection of factual statements may be read with considerable interest by anyone with an affection for Venice, as a kind of snapshot reminder of that enchanted city, but beyond this limited function the picture does not exist. It is a parasite on its subject: it neither intensifies nor clarifies our sentiment or our understanding. At best it merely stirs up some pleasant associations and engages our attention momentarily because the representational trickery of brush and paint is so deft. It is an immediately attractive and then almost as immediately a wearisome picture. It badgers us with irrelevant details; it nags at us to admire the flashy skill with which they are represented. Oddly enough, for all its detailed accuracy it is only superficially a true picture of the scene. Looking across the Canal toward Santa Maria della Salute one is conscious of the openness of sky, the flatness of water, the isolation of beautiful monuments within these expanses. The haphazard and accidental minutiae of the city are lost within this bigger scheme.

It is the big scheme with which Corot has concerned himself, not only by the selection of a more distant point of view but also by the arbitrary selection and placement of such elements as packing cases, barrels, and human figures, as well as moored boats, to balance and harmonize the architectural elements whose placement is predetermined. The resultant composition is more nostalgically a reminder of Venice than Meissonier's snapshot can ever be, even though it contains conspicuous elements, such as Oriental figures and sailing vessels, that none of us has ever seen there. But this evocative power is the least important aspect of Corot's achievement. Because he is an original spirit where Meissonier was a commonplace one, Corot sees Venice through a personality that invests it with the serenity and harmony of his own vision and thus enlarges our own vision of it. And quite aside from the fact that this is a picture of a certain city, it is a painting in which the disposition of forms would be deeply satisfying even if the subject were as completely an invented one as *The Funeral of Phocion.*

It is possible to discover in a general way how Corot's apparent objectivity has transcended itself, although his own comments on the quality of his objectivity are of no help at all. "I paint a woman's breast exactly as I would paint an ordinary bottle of milk," he said. No description could be more inaccurate than this one with its crassness and its implied denial of any selective response to visible reality. He could better have said, "I paint an ordinary bottle of milk as if it were a woman's breast," for every object he paints is part of a world elevated by the contemplation of this one with sentiment and dignity.

Like Poussin's, Corot's world is a quiet one where contemplation offers greater pleasures than action. Like Poussin's it is a world regarded from a distance, yet from this distance it is a world of extraordinary clarity. This clarity may be close to magical, as it is in the transformation of *The House and Factory of M. Henry* [146] and *Village Church, Rosny* [147] from commonplace-

3. COROT: *The House and Factory of M. Henry,* 1833. 33 x 41". ladelphia Museum of Art, Wilstach Collection.

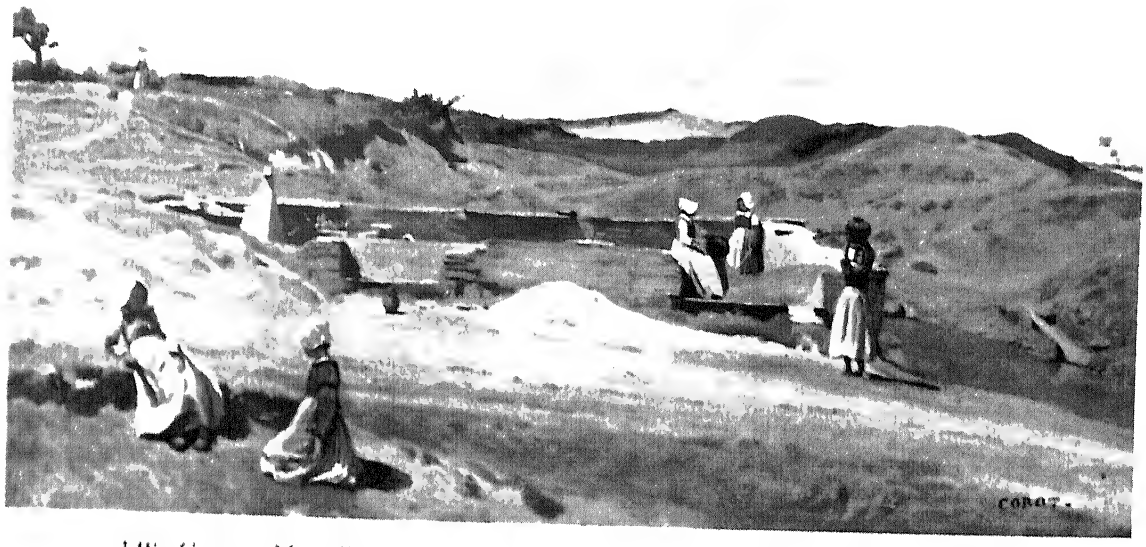


147. COROT: *Village Church, Rosny*, 1844. 21⅝ x 31⅝". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Bruce Wescott, Clinton, N.J.

ness or pretty picturesqueness into enchantment. The eye is freed from its limitations and sees the smallest details in faraway objects. But these details are never prolix. Like everything else they are selected and adjusted into harmony and balance. Corot's world is simpler than Poussin's, more intimate because it is less complex. And where Poussin's world is created serene within a kind of crystal vacuum, Corot's has become serene surrounded by the breath of life. And in the two pictures just mentioned, the peaceful innocence so characteristic of Corot's world is emphasized by the suggestion of naïveté, almost of awkwardness, in the draughtsmanship of certain details, notably the human figures. This occurs frequently in Corot's paintings and is a larger factor in setting the character of his world than is generally recognized.

Apparently Corot never formulated a specific problem for himself, never worked toward the crystallization of any aesthetic theory. To say that he "felt his way" toward expression is misleading if it suggests fumbling. But it will do very well to describe his way of creating pictures, if by "feeling his way" we mean the development of acute sensitivities to form and value and color relationships that must be brought into balance by a sense of their rightness without dependence on rule. When the composition of a picture is systematic (*The Oath of the Horatii*, or *Raft of the Medusa*), it is possible to define the relationship of each part to the whole without fear of misreading the painter's scheme. But when the composition is "felt," there is always the danger that an effort to analyze it by hindsight may yield conclusions that would surprise the painter who organized it in the first place.

Nevertheless, what can we find in a small Corot called *Mur, Côtes du Nord* [148] where he was free to dispose the forms compositionally in any way he chose, not being bound by the predisposition of forms existing as the buildings of a city? We might say that of the five little figures, the one to the left in the background group echoes the attitude of the corresponding one in the foreground pair, thus tying the groups together. Or reading the figures as a foreground group of two and a back



148. Corot: *Mur, Côtes du Nord*, 1850–55. 13 x 21⅜". Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.

ground group of three, we may enjoy the variety of this balance. On the other hand, the standing figure may be separated from the rest and we may find that the picture is composed as a kind of double seesaw with the mound of earth, center, as a pivot. One plank of the seesaw would stretch diagonally into the depth of the picture from foreground left to middleground right, balanced at either end by paired figures. The second plank on the same pivot would cross the first at right angles, balanced at either end by the standing figure and the pyramidal block centered above and behind the heads of the foreground figures.

Whether the picture is analyzed from any of these beginnings or from any one of a half a dozen other possible ones, everything in it falls reasonably into place. Yet the composition was probably not schematic in Corot's mind. *The Oath of the Horatii* and *Raft of the Medusa* are both variations on accepted schemes, the *Horatii* with icy brilliance, the *Raft* with respectable competence. But Corot could not bring himself to borrow even the elementary skeleton of an established compositional formula. "It is better to be nothing than to be the echo of other paintings," he wrote in his notebook. His quietness makes his originality inconspicuous, yet Corot was as original as any of the noisier revolutionaries who made great stirs in his lifetime.

Corot: Portraits and Figure Studies

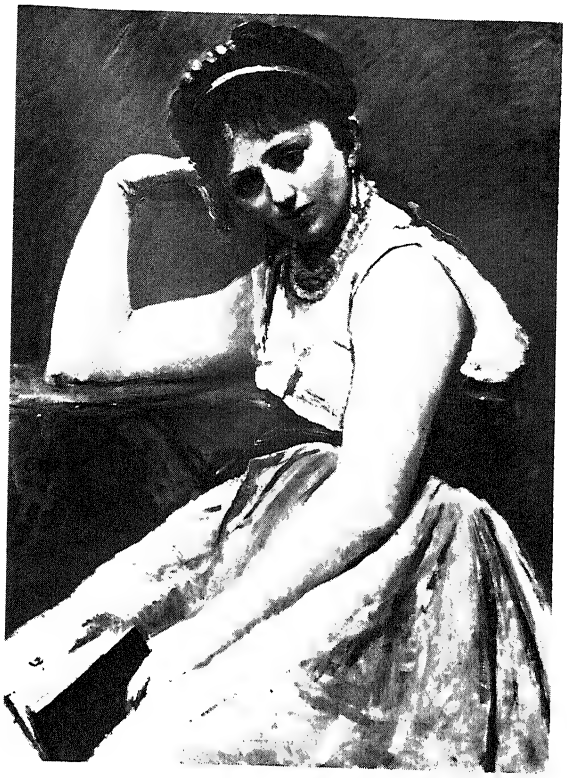
During his lifetime Corot's portraits and figure studies were all but ignored; today they have become the most sought after of all his work. Usually these are of young women, only now and then of men or children. There are well above 300 of them, of which Corot exhibited only two, and they are the most personal work of an unusually personal artist. Like his landscapes, they are a firm bridge between tradition and contemporary painting. This is a general statement and is most important as a general one, but it may be brought down to specific terms by comparisons of Corot's *Woman with the Pearl* [150] with Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* [149] and of

149. Leonardo da Vinci: *Mona Lisa, c.* 1505. 30½ x 20⅞". Louvre, Paris.

150. Corot: *Woman with the Pearl, c.* 1868–70. 27½ x 21¼". Louvre, Paris.

his *Interrupted Reading* [151] with Picasso's *Lady with a Fan* [152].

The similarity between *Woman with the Pearl* and *Mona Lisa* is too close to be accidental and, of course, Corot was familiar with the Renaissance masterpiece in the Louvre. Originally he followed it even more closely; he first painted the hair in an arrangement like Mona Lisa's and then modified it. The strands can still be seen as raised pigment in *Woman with the Pearl* although Corot has painted them out in giving his model a different coiffure. But for all its frank use of the earlier picture as a prototype, *Woman with the Pearl* is not an Italianate imitation but an original work of art. While French academic painters were imitating the surfaces of Renaissance painting, mistaking stylistic plagiarism for philosophical union with the masters (even Ingres was guilty sometimes), Corot brushed superficialities to one side and understood the formal construction upon which the Renaissance statement was based. Like *Mona Lisa, Woman with the Pearl* is a massing of volumes building from the hands, placed parallel to the picture plane, into the masses of the torso, turned slightly away into the picture space, and returning as the head returns toward a full frontal view. These major volumes and the movement from one to another are enriched by the minor ones that compose them. Corot understands this formal structure but



151. Corot: *Interrupted Reading*, 1865–70. 36½ x 25¾". Art Institute of Chicago, Potter Palmer Collection.

152. Picasso: *Lady with a Fan*, 1905. 39¾ x 32". Collection Mr. and Mrs. Averell Harriman, New York.

utilizes it for individual expression, just as an architect might understand the construction of Renaissance buildings with their arches and vaults and the nobility of their volumes but would make contemporary use of the concept without rebuilding a Renaissance palace. *Woman with the Pearl* has the tenderness and the intimacy of Corot's finest landscapes; it has also their structural subtlety of form and color which invests an apparently casual subject with a truly classical repose. Such trivial and apparently realistic details as the folds of a sleeve, a loosely fastened bodice, a fall of hair, are parts of an image so firmly integrated that trivialities are transmuted into ideal monumentality. Corot's achievement in paintings like this one was to bring into absolute harmony the apparently incompatible elements of intimacy and nobility, of sensitive vision and formal abstraction.

It is this formal abstraction that allies him to modern painting. Even more than *Woman with the Pearl, Interrupted Reading* seems casual in its pose. The pose, also, is more original and more complicated in its building up of mutually supporting and balancing volumes. The similarity to Picasso's *Lady with a Fan* is probably coincidental, but it is not very important whether the composition of the modern picture, consciously or not, stems from Corot's. What is important is that the masterful abstract construction, which in Corot is concealed beneath a deceptive appearance of inconsequential ease, is emphasized in Picasso where the pose is frankly an artificial one. In Picasso's design the abstractions of pictorial composition are exposed for their own interest, demanding at least equal attention with whatever emotional or evocative character the painting may

also have. In other words, Corot's painting is traditional in that its abstractions are concealed from the lay observer even though they account for much of the painting's appeal to him; Picasso's is "modern" because these abstractions are brought to the surface and attention is called to them in order to make the most of the intellectual pleasure such abstractions afford.

This is the fundamental revolution in modern painting, and as this story goes on we will see that eventually the result is a reversal of values: in traditional painting, abstract values must be sought beneath the immediate representational and emotional or evocative ones. In modern painting, emotional and philosophical values may be deciphered within abstractions that seem at first not to offer them. But this is a parenthetical jump into the twentieth century, which the reader may feel free to forget for the moment. In the meanwhile, it is enough to remember that Corot is a formal painter as well as an artist of tender sensibility.

His *Mother and Child on Beach* [153] demonstrates both aspects with particular emphasis. The protective gesture of the young mother, which could easily have turned mawkish, is as dignified as it is gentle. The figure is designed in unusually large and simple volumes, with a broad and powerful movement initiated by the arclike fold at the bottom of the skirt, continuing in the emphatic one running along the right side up to the waist, then continuing along the back to terminate in the oval of the head. The broad sweep of this circling movement dips suddenly and flows along the long arms to terminate when it finds its goal, the figure of the child, which is painted as a solid, static pyramid, an effective brake on a movement so strong that it demands this decisive termination if it is not to carry us outside the picture. This strong static element on the left is reflected on the right by the two parallel horizontal bands of light cloth at the bottom of the picture and the triangular fold of cloth of the skirt just above them; this in turn is incorporated within the general movement of the forms first described.

It is difficult to avoid enumerating dozens of Corot's figure pictures in discussing

153. Corot: *Mother and Child on Beach*, 1868–70. 14⅞ x 18⅛". Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.

them, since each one offers new delights and new variations on his theme. Yet this theme should seem limited, since again and again he presents us with a picture where the mood is one of gentle, inconsequential revery, touched by the faintest melancholy and a hint of languor, a mood that would pall and would certainly degenerate into trifling affectation if it were not stated in forms of such logical decision, revealed in steady, moderate light, constructed in colors dominated by the subtlest grays, grayed blues, creamy yellows, and occasional accents of rich reds. It is an art of nuances—nuances of form, of color, of mood. If the pictures have a quality of simplicity it is because these nuances are perfectly controlled to fuse form, color, and mood into a harmony so unified that it appears to have been arrived at all of a piece. One of the masterpieces is *Young Greek Girl* [155], a portrait of Emma Dobigny, a favorite model of Corot's. The Greek costume is only an accessory. Corot's "Albanian Girls," "Jewesses of Algiers," "Oriental Women," "Judiths," and "Gypsies" have nothing to do with the passionate drama of romanticism, nor do his occasional

154. COROT: *The Artist's Studio,* 1865–70. 16 x 13". Baltimore Museum of Art, Cone Collection.

155. COROT: *Young Greek Girl,* 1868–70. 32⅝ x 21¼". Collection Mr. and Mrs. J. Watson Webb, New York.

nude bacchantes have anything to do with revelries of the flesh.

Corot's figures are most at home costumed, and indoors. Although he frequently fabricates a landscape behind them, they remain surrounded by the quiet air, the peaceful seclusion, the intimate protection, of a simple and familiar interior. In one series of figure studies he represents models in his studio, showing a corner of the room, and his easel [154]. Corot's natural habitat is the secluded room, the quiet landscape, or the city in moments when its monuments and rivers and the spaces of its streets and squares are at rest. Yet Corot was an active man. He served on Salon juries; he traveled; he had a great success; he knew and was admired by the most conspicuous of his contemporary painters. But by the evidence of his art, which surely may be trusted, the world of activity did not impinge upon the world of contemplation in which he lived. Corot's world is exceptional in its privacy, more exceptional in that this privacy is untouched by the morbidity or bitterness of so many worlds where people live alone.

Corot once compared Delacroix to an eagle and himself to a lark. He was satisfied, he said, with his "own little music." From anyone else the comparison would be patronizing, and even from Corot it is misleading. His art is more robust and more profound than the comparison implies. It is an art of solidity, of modesty, of dignity, of contemplation, of serenity. It is an art where reverence for simplicity is combined with mastery of civilized nuance. These are not the virtues of "little music" or of little painting.

CHAPTER 5

The Salon at Mid-century

The Academy and the Salon

By every implication in this story so far, the Academy has been cast in the role of villain. This is type-casting, and like all type-casting it is the result of one magnificent performance. In the decades just after the middle of the century, following the relatively mild persecution of Courbet, the Academy seemed determined to annihilate all French painters of genius, offering its awards, both honorary and financial, to a clique that included some of the most desperately mediocre talents ever to have made their mark in the history of art.

The Academy's motives, like the motives of other villains, seemed to itself virtuous and high-minded. Its position seemed impregnable. But its defeat, after some spectacular battles, was sufficiently ignoble to satisfy its bitterest enemies. The very word *academic* has come to mean stuffy, trite, reactionary. An introduction to this chastened institution and the painters who received its favors is in order if we are to understand why it is still so beleaguered by historians of modern art, and why it rejected and reviled the men who have become recognized as the great painters of the time.

The Academy was founded in 1648 under the patronage of Louis XIV as the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture. It was soon dominated by a painter named Charles Lebrun (1619–1690), whose skillful and flatulent *Louis XIV Offering Thanks* [156] is a good example of the style to which he was addicted. Lebrun was an excellent painter, in the sense that he could be depended upon to turn out a good, workmanlike job on any assignment that

156. LEBRUN: *Louis XIV Offering Thanks,* date unknown. 190 x 104". *Musée des Beaux Arts,* Lyon.

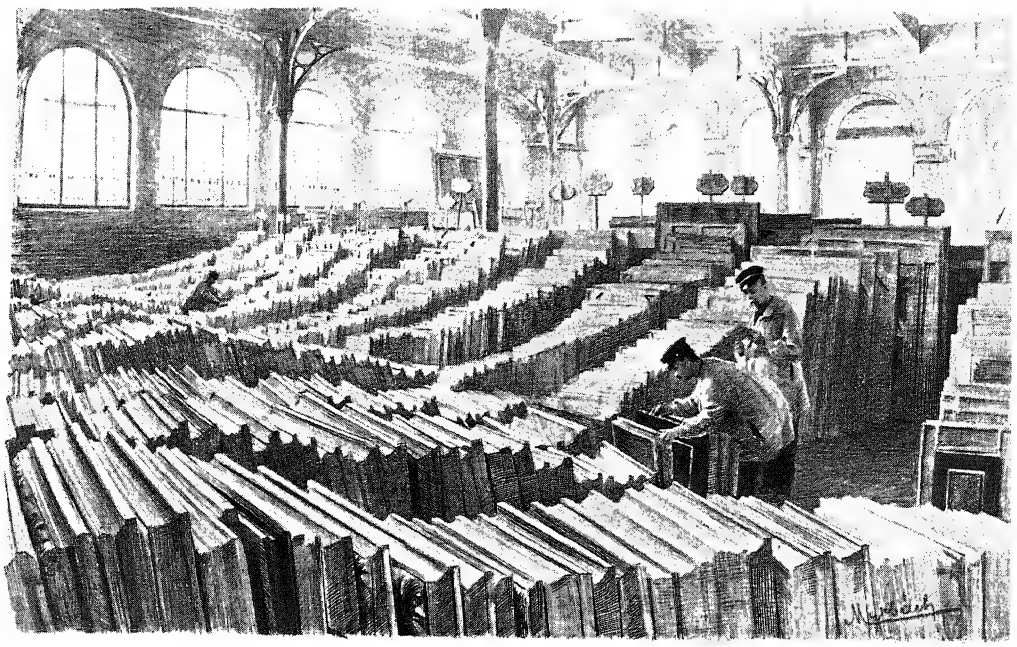
could be executed according to the rules. But when we have said that, we have come close to defining an industrious hack. And indeed Lebrun was frequently nothing more than that. *Louis XIV Offering Thanks* is far from his best or his worst picture, and it can stand very well as a typical example of the kind of picture known unflatteringly as an "academic machine."

An academic machine is a technical exercise demonstrating the painter's degree of skill in manipulating the standard techniques of drawing, painting, and arranging a picture according to established formulas. And it should be said now that an academic machine is an academic machine whether the industrious hack is following Lebrun's formula or one of Picasso's. Contemporary exhibitions are full of pictures not only as meretricious as the worst of Lebrun's but fabricated on much less demanding patterns.

Because he was a pedant rather than a creative artist, Lebrun set the French Academy off in the wrong direction from the beginning. This could have doomed it to wither away into impotence, except that the Academy was maintained in a position of great power by circumstances having nothing to do with the creative genius or the creative shortcomings of the men who controlled it. The head of the Academy, in the service of the king, with fat commissions to dole out to the faithful, could dictate his own recipe as the credo of art—and those painters who were not willing to conform to his recipe could go elsewhere and do as best they could at keeping body and soul together.

The moving spirit behind the formation of the Academy was neither Louis XIV nor Lebrun, but the king's minister of finance, Colbert, who recognized Lebrun's special fitness for the job at hand and selected him for it. Colbert was one of those statesmen, appearing here and there in history, who have recognized the value of art as an instrument of national propaganda and have so employed it. Believing that a government is measured by the yardstick of the monuments created under it, Colbert conceived of the Academy as a caucus of architects, painters, and sculptors with authority to determine an appropriate national character for the arts.

The great French painter of the century was a man twenty-five years older than Lebrun, Nicolas Poussin, whose *Funeral of Phocion* [128] we have already seen.

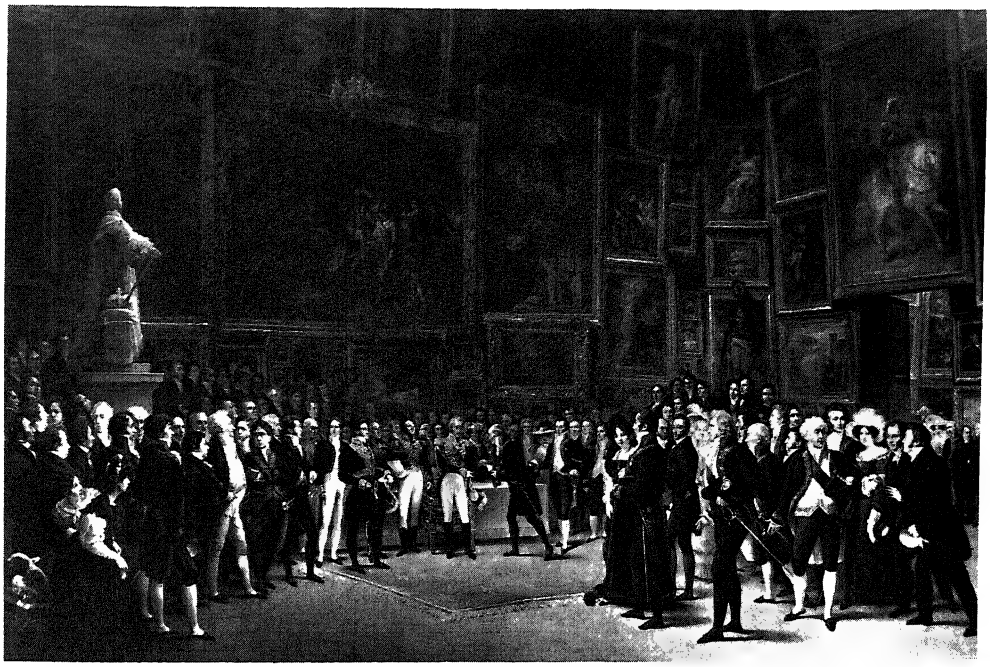


157. Felicien Myrbach-Rheinfeld: *Candidates for Admission to the Paris Salon (Basement of Palais d'Industrie)*. Date unknown. Drawing, probably for an illustrated journal. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Poussin was fifty-four years old when the Academy was founded and had left France for the second time because he could not tolerate the intrigues of the established artists and could not prostitute himself to the grandiose projects for which Lebrun was soon to become the ideal director. Poussin spent most of his life in Italy where he was free to paint as he pleased, nourished by the monuments of classical antiquity in his creation of an art of serenity, of contemplation, of order and balance and depth.

Poussin would have been the natural leader of the Academy if its second and more admirable function had not gone begging. For in addition to regulating the character of the arts, the Academy was supposed to perpetuate all that was best in their great tradition. In truth, Colbert and Lebrun probably thought of these two functions as identical. But they could not be, because they were based on the premise that great art can be produced by formula, and it cannot. No formula can make a great artist out of a mediocre one, and any formula will restrict the expression of certain painters, usually those with something new to say. The Academy patronized men of talent who were content to work within the formula it approved. This is all very well as far as it goes, since there was plenty of work to be done by men of conscience and discretion well-trained in their craft. This training the Academy could supply. But as a corollary, it is also true that the Academy often starved out men of genius, since by definition genius transcends formula by extraordinary powers of invention.

The artist without official standing could of course subsist on private patronage, as Poussin largely did, and during the eighteenth century the Academy's stranglehold was weakened by a class made up of individuals of wealth and cultivation in the arts, capable of recognizing original talents, who supported whatever painters pleased them, in or out of academic favor. But academic strictures remained effective in the official schools, where arbitrary standards were perpetuated and talent was disciplined into conventional channels by the prospect of material rewards for the docile student.



158. HEIM: *Charles X Distributing Awards, Salon of 1824, in the Grand Salon of the Louvre.* Exhibited Salon of 1827, re-exhibited 1855. 68 x 101". Louvre, Paris.

These were the schools David cried out against, in the name of art, justice, and youth, when he annihilated the Royal Academy at the time of the Revolution.

But the new Academy under David's influence (not directly under him, for he consistently refused to accept official directorship of the school) was more vicious than it had been before. The worst aspect of the situation was that the Revolution shifted the market for paintings from a small, aristocratic, knowledgeable group of patrons to a large, common, aesthetically ignorant public. The Salon became a gigantic sales room to serve the *bourgeoisie*, who in their eagerness for the acquisition of "culture" accepted the academic stamp of approval as a guarantee of art.

The Salon was a cruel weapon. Its jury of admission held the power of professional life or death for the painter still in search of his public. The beginner who tried to bring his work to attention elsewhere was in the position of a merchant opening a store with merchandise stamped "defective" by government officials. Pictures poured in for submission to the Salon in such quantities [157] that as many as 4,000 might be rejected from a single exhibition, in spite of the fact that in the largest Salons as many as 5,000 might be hung, crowded on vast walls, frame to frame, from eye level to ceiling. The pictures in poor locations might be next to invisible but at least they had received the stamp of approval—literally the Salon stamp on the back—while rejected pictures might be returned to the artist indelibly stamped with the "R" for *refusé*, thus rendered unsaleable. A purchaser might take an option on a picture, subject to its passing the jury, or might refuse to accept one already purchased because it failed to do so. The presentation of awards at the end of the Salons were state events of solemnity and importance [158].

Although the system originated in France, it flourished vigorously, if less tempestuously, throughout Europe. England's Royal Academy was, and is, particularly respectable and its private receptions [352] were, and are, particularly fashionable. But in France the Salon became also a public

battleground, with the academicians entrenched in fortified positions assaulted by rebel forces. Once they had battled their way in (as the romantic painters did) the rebels had a way of turning respectable themselves, joining ranks with the traditional painters to oppose the next wave of dissenters. During the nineteenth century, revolts followed one another so rapidly that a group of painters would hardly be established in a strategic position before it was attacked from the rear by another. The French public enjoyed the battles and took sides, mostly for the conservatives. Throngs of people crowded the exhibitions, and the Salon prize winners became the subject of vehement discussions.

Every fledgling painter hoped that from the colossal grab bag his entry would somehow emerge as the season's success, or, lacking that, even as the season's scandal—as the *Raft of the Medusa, Massacres of Scio,* and *A Burial at Ornans* had done. But these pictures were exceptions. Most of the entries fell obediently within conventional categories or failed to pass the jury. There would be the moralistic allegories; there would be the hundreds of history pictures celebrating great events in pompous terms; there would be the cute children, the sentimental anecdotes, the picturesque landscapes; and always there would be the armies of nudes—nymphs, Venuses, and bathers caught by surprise. There would be the imitations of every picture that had ever made a Salon success, warmed over and hopefully served up again. There would be the sound, craftsmanlike, first-rate work of second-rate men, and, here and there within the interminable stretches of bad, mediocre, and respectable painting would be a work of art. Almost a quarter of a million pictures were exhibited in Salons during the nineteenth century in France alone.

The painter's problem was how to compete for attention in such a field. Startling originality, by which painters may strain for attention today, was ruled out in the first place, if not by the painter's lack of imagination, then by the fact that the jury was unlikely to accept a startlingly original work. Sheer technical excellence was not much help either, since the over-all technical level of Salon pictures was very high. It is appalling to look over old Salon catalogues and see the hundreds of painters whose technical mastery seems equalled only by their aesthetic and spiritual idiocy. (Where are all these paintings now? Those in museums have sunk by degrees to the basements; the rest are in those even more mysterious limbos where unwanted paintings await an improbable resurrection.)

Subject—what the picture was "about," the story it told—took on exaggerated importance as one way of differentiating between pictures all cast in the same technical mold. Or a painter with the time, energy, and means to devote himself to the production of an unsaleable picture might stand out by means of another device: size. The Salon system produced the phenomenon of the demonstration piece painted for exhibition only, so large that it could not be lost in the crowd. But unless it was purchased by the State, a painter could do nothing with a demonstration picture after the Salon closed except roll it up and store it away in the hope that the State would eventually acquire it. This is what actually happened when the pictures were manifestos of new movements and were preserved, either by the painter or by perceptive collectors, until time had proven the importance of the movement. Courbet's mammoth *The Painter's Studio,* for instance, remained in his possession until his death, and was sold as part of the contents of his studio in 1881. After resale to another private collector, it was finally purchased for the Louvre in 1920, sixty-five years after Courbet painted it, with funds collected by public subscription.

The idea upon which the Salon system was supposed to be based was sound: the Salon was supposed to offer an annual exhibition of the best work by established painters and a proving ground for new talent. Jurors would have had to be superhuman to perform their task with complete effectiveness, but they were much less than that. If a generality is ever safe, it is safe to say that for several decades beginning around 1850 the men controlling the Academy and the Salon were all but blind aes-

159. LANDSEER: *A Distinguished Member of the Humane Society*, *c.* 1838. 42½ x 55". Tate Gallery, London.

thetically, and all but sadistic in their persecution of any painter who fell out of line with their goosestep. This was bad enough, but their unpardonable crime was that they debauched public taste under the pretense —or, more generously, under the illusion— that they were elevating it in their systematic program to reduce the art of painting to sterile repetitions of exhausted formulas. Yet in spite of everything, these decades were one of the most vigorous, original, and productive periods in the history of painting. This fact is a tribute to the vitality of French creative genius, which to date has always emerged victorious in its constant struggle with equally French suspicion of change.

The Salon of 1855

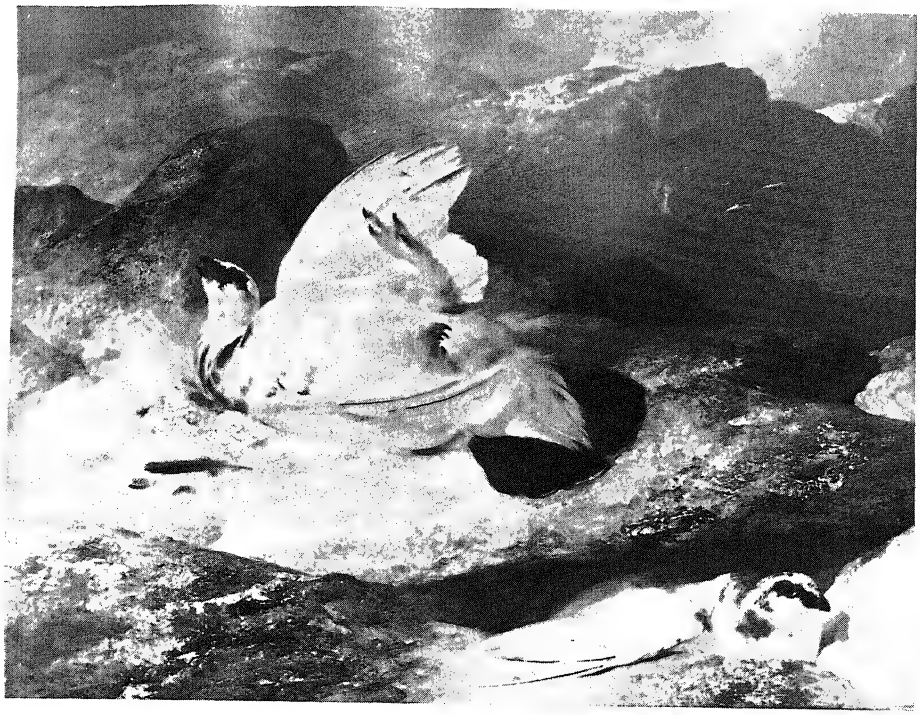
The Salon of 1855 was a climactic one and has already been mentioned in connection with Delacroix, who was given a large retrospective as one section of it, with Ingres, who relented after twenty years of abstention from Salon exhibition to accept a similar honor, and with Courbet, who was rejected and built his Pavilion of Realism to get a showing for *The Painter's Studio*. It was the biggest Salon ever held and was made international as part of the great Exposition Universelle of that year. We will use it here to examine the nature of Salon art, since its awards went to painters whose work is a summary of Salon standards at the time and for the rest of the century.

Ingres was induced to exhibit by hints that the government had him in mind for special honors when the awards were announced, but these honors did not materialize. He received the Salon's highest award, a Grand Medal of Honor, but so did nine other painters, including his enemy Delacroix. The report of the jury to Emperor Napoleon III carefully listed the winners alphabetically with no comment, although in classifications other than the fine arts the various juries gave reasons for their decisions. Apparently the competition among manufacturers or engineers, who sent in tens of thousands of exhibits, was less touchy and personal than the rivalry among painters and sculptors.

Of the ten Grand Medals of Honor in painting, three went to eminent foreigners: Peter von Cornelius (Prussia), Sir Edwin Landseer (United Kingdom), and Hendrik Leys (Belgium).

Von Cornelius (1783–1867) was an inevitable choice. He was Director of the Academy of Munich, a corresponding member for his country to the Institute of France, and he was also a conventional and skilled painter of portraits and scenes from religious history. The medal was a bow to France's neighbor to the east.

Landseer (1802–1873) received a medal as a similar gesture across the English Channel. A comparative youngster of fifty-three (Cornelius was seventy-two at this time, Ingres seventy-five), he was already the dean of English painters because no other man in the history of art managed to paint animals so much as if they were human beings. With its coy title, *A Distinguished Member of the Humane Society* [159] is typical of Landseer's pictorial manipulation of the pathetic fallacy. A generation now in its fifties and sixties must still remember the picture from their primers or framed on the nursery walls, for it became universally popular. Landseer



160. LANDSEER: *Blackcock*, *c.* 1874. 19¾ x 26". Collection Henry P. McIlhenny, Castle Glenveagh, County Donegal, Ireland.

could paint a stag and invest it with all the dignity of an eminent conservative clubman. He also painted pictures that, like *Blackcock* [160], keep appearing as a rebuke to his wasted talent. *Blackcock* is a harmony in grays, tans, and whites, with a dash of bright blood on the snow. It is as richly painted as a Courbet, and it treats birds as birds, not as simpering human beings. Landseer was an expert draughtsman, and his drawings are beginning to interest collectors again. From the great mass of his work it would be possible to cull a small group of fine paintings.

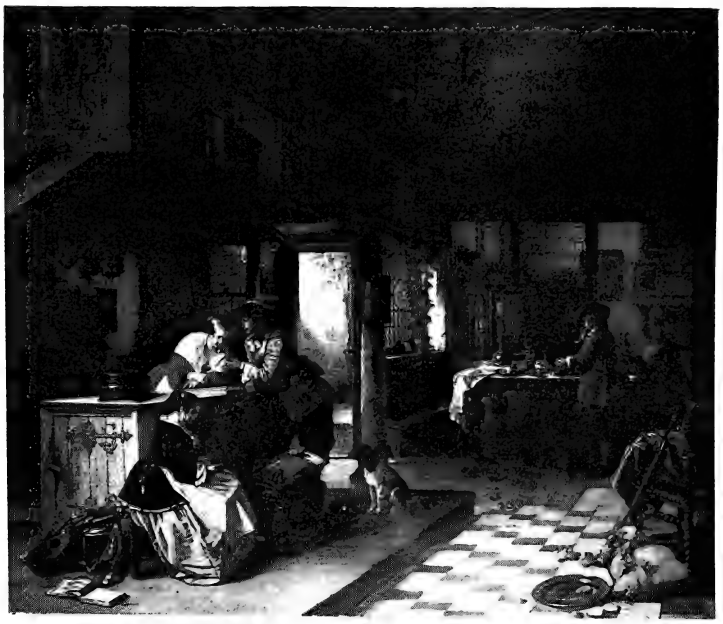
Leys (1815–1869) was even younger but even better connected; he was a painter of history pictures, genre subjects [161], portraits, and official decorative pictures of the usual kind. There is nothing wrong with his work except that it is routine.

These three awards, however, were more concerned with international courtesy than with the art of painting. The awards made to Frenchmen give a more accurate idea of Salon taste.

Grand Medals of Honor, 1855

Although some of the award winners in 1855 now seem too bad to have been true, we can fairly use this year as an example because the awards were made with particular care to summarize France's preeminence in the arts. The sprinkling of good pictures among them shows that the jury was more perceptive than in many other years, and the inclusion of a few former heretics shows an effort toward open-mindedness. Even Courbet had some paintings accepted; it was the rejection of *The Painter's Studio* and, for exhibition a second time, *A Burial at Ornans*, that caused the excitement and in retrospect leaves the jury open to charges of bias. The 1855 jury was a good one as juries went.

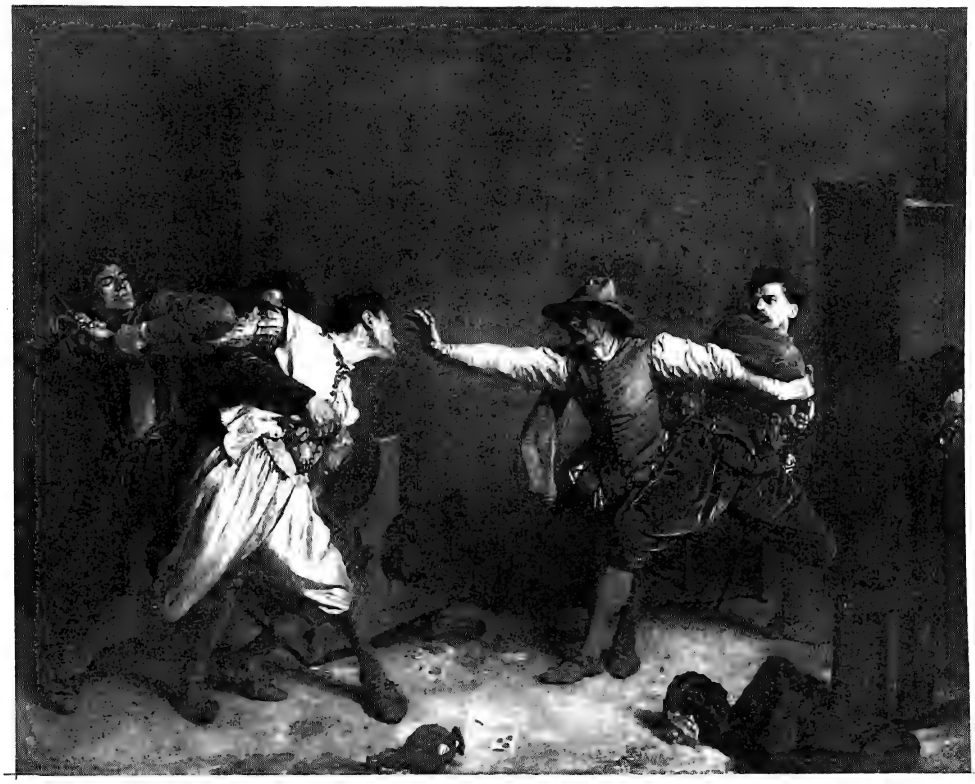
Among the seven Frenchmen receiving the Grand Medal of Honor, the star was neither Ingres nor Delacroix, but a terrible little man named Jean Louis Ernest Meissonier (1815–1891), whose view of Venice [145] has already been compared with one



161. Leys: *Interior of an Inn*, 1849. 28⅞ x 35¼". Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.

by Corot. At twenty-five Meissonier won his first Salon medal in the lower brackets, and a year later (1841) he was awarded a higher one. After two years he went up another notch, and he repeated this success five years later. Then in the 1855 exhibition came his Grand Medal of Honor for a picture called *La Rixe* (*The Brawl*) [162], which was such a success that Napoleon III selected it from all others for purchase and presentation to Queen Victoria as a souvenir of the English sovereign's visit to the Exposition. By now Meissonier was forty years old; he lived to be seventy-six and continued to accumulate honors until new ones had to be invented for him. He was the first French painter to receive the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, among other things. There was no question in his mind, and there seemed to be little in the minds of many rational people, that he was

162. Meissonier: *La Rixe* (*The Brawl*), 1855. 17¼ x 22". Collection H.M. Queen Elizabeth II.



163. MEISSONIER: *1814*, 1864. 19¼ x 29½". Louvre, Paris.

the Leonardo da Vinci, the Michelangelo, of modern times. In his later years he cultivated a tremendous white beard that dropped to his waist. He was fond of patterning it carefully in a series of points and posing in a black velvet robe with a jeweled belt. In this costume and with his prize beard cascading down the velvet he would assume an expression of fiercely profound and melancholy thought, as one who has transcended the intellectual limitations of mortal man, and thus he would have himself photographed or painted.

It is maddening to remember that while this mean-spirited, cantankerous, and vindictive little man was adulated, great painters were without money for paints and brushes. The typical Meissonier is a dry, pinched, painstaking illustration of some event from military history, usually Napoleonic, or a semihumorous anecdote enacted by models in costume, frequently the costume of seventeenth-century musketeers. *La Rixe* is a variation, not humorous, on this formula, and it is one of his best works, probably his best in this genre category.

Meissonier offered the new picture-buying public exactly what it wanted. In the first place, his pictures told little stories; they were easy to "understand." And the little figures enacting these stories were laboriously and accurately detailed. The public demanded that a painting be something which had quite obviously been difficult to do, like a cathedral built from toothpicks. Not only did Meissonier put every tiniest highlight on every button, but it was even possible to identify a soldier's regiment from some of these buttons. What Meissonier lacked in imagination (which is to say, everything) he would have made up in meticulous execution, if such a void could have been filled by a device so meaningless.

It was not until after 1855, about 1859, that Meissonier began his series of Napoleonic subjects. His *1814* [163], showing Napoleon in the final days of the debacle of empire, is a good example and today the best known of his many pictures of Napoleonic victories and defeats. It is an achievement of a kind to do what Meissonier did:

164. DECAMPS: *Oriental Night Scene, c.* 1840. 20¾ x 20¾". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Johnson Collection.

to take the history of military campaigns where men died in blood, or of starvation and exposure, to take events that were flung across a continent, that marked the rise and the collapse of an empire and changed the direction of history in the Western world, to take triumphs and cataclysms full of glory, terror, and anguish, to take all this and reduce it to nothing more than a well organized collection of lead soldiers accurately uniformed. Meissonier has left accounts of his efforts to create the effect of snow by spraying miniature models with borax or sugar, accounts so naïve in their enthusiasm for imitation that they would be touching if this man had not been mistaken for a great painter. Nothing he ever did suggests for a moment that he conceived of painting as anything beyond a display of manual skill, or of his subjects as anything more than pegs upon which to hang this display. In his *1814,* it might be granted that the infinite details have been neatly packed into their container, and that the picture suggests, however faintly, some mood of sadness and regret. But these are inadequate virtues in the circumstances. The defeated Emperor's air of dejection might just as well be that of a man who has committed an embarrassing *faux pas* at an important social gathering and has been sent home in bad weather with an unusually large escort. Whatever else we can read into *1814,* whatever it says of grandeur and collapse, we must read into it for ourselves by our knowledge and associations with the pictured event. The painting is, in short, completely a parasite on what it is about. In that capacity, of course, it is perfect.

For this very reason this kind of painting pleased—and on the same terms much of it still does, for that matter. But it has nothing to do with art for all that it has to do with craftsmanship, nothing to do with expression for all its detailed illustration, nothing to do with the human spirit or with the enlargement or intensification or clarification of human experience. Even as a technical exercise it is unoriginal; its superiority to the rank and file of Salon pictures is only one of degree, not of kind. Meissonier says nothing. Behind his preoccupation with representing scenes from Napoleonic history lies the confused thinking that can attribute greatness to a painting on the strength of the greatness of the pictured event. But greatness does not rub off in this way. Meissonier manages to reduce some of the most important, dramatic, and harrowing events in history to the expressive level of a well-shined shoe. The polish is admirable, but in the long run not very important.*

After Meissonier, whose art was so spectacularly pointless, the remaining Grand Medal winners, now forgotten, are a little dull. This is too bad in the case of Alexandre Gabriel Decamps (1803–1860), a

* Like all painters of skill without imagination, Meissonier was at his best when he was at his least pretentious. He did some very pleasant exercises where his photographic eye and his well-trained hand combined to reproduce nicely selected bits of typical French countryside. As literal objective mementos of a scene, these can be most attractive, and if Meissonier had painted nothing else he might have been remembered as a sound landscape painter of the second rank, limited but never bothersome.

165. DECAMPS: *The Experts*, 1837. 18¼ x 25¾". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

painter for whom one would like to find a generous word. His work retains a certain vigor and some force of color. In *Oriental Night Scene* [164], as a typical example, reds and yellows are bright and rich against a ground of browns and blacks. Although a younger man than either Ingres or Delacroix, like them Decamps was given a room to himself for the exhibition of fifty pictures, and his work was discussed by the critics as if he were of their caliber.

Decamps tried his hand at a variety of pictorial work, including some political cartoons that might look better if they did not have to stand comparison with Daumier's, which were appearing at the same time. One painting, *The Experts* [165], showing some monkeys at work judging a picture, indicates that Decamps was not entirely fooled by the Salon system. But although one would like to do so, it is difficult to find Decamps very interesting today. He is a respectable painter but not a very stimulating one. Meissonier has a morbid fascination, but Decamps is too good to be interesting as a bad painter. As a matter of fact he was one of the earliest Orientalists. He traveled in Asia Minor before Delacroix went to Morocco. But he was content to illustrate rather than to interpret, and as an Orientalist he remains a genre painter whose subjects are taken from Turkish and Arabian locales. This is why the majority of the critics in 1855 preferred him to Delacroix. He was easier.

The other Grand Medal winners may be considered briefly:

Émile Jean Horace Vernet (1789–1863), was the son and grandson of two other Vernets, painters of some distinction. The talent was running thin by the third generation but was still adequate for the manufacture of history and military subjects by the standard recipes. Vernet was a happy, popular, successful man whose family tradition certainly helped bring him his medal.

François Joseph Heim (1787–1865), was a classical painter of the most academic kind. From his *Prix de Rome* in 1807 to his Grand Medal of Honor in 1855 his career

166. HEIM: *Scene from Jewish History*, Salon of 1824, re-exhibited 1855. 154¼ x 181⅛". Louvre, Paris.

could be used as an example to prove that slow, steady, and conventional wins the race. His *Scene from Jewish History* [166] is an exercise in Davidian style consistent enough to look for a moment like something more. Then one sees that it is nothing but an assemblage of polished but meaningless parts, an exercise indeed. It is the kind of picture that, if torn to pieces, might yield many fragments suggesting that the total might have been a neo-classical painting of the best kind, for in the fragments the Davidian disciplines are apparent, and one is free to believe that surely so much sound craftsmanship must have served some expressive purpose. Heim also painted the interior panorama of *Charles X Distributing Awards to Artists at the End of the Exhibition of 1824* illustrated in the early pages of this chapter [158]. Here he comes off better in a picture adapted to his talents, the detailed representation of an event where factual record is an end in itself.

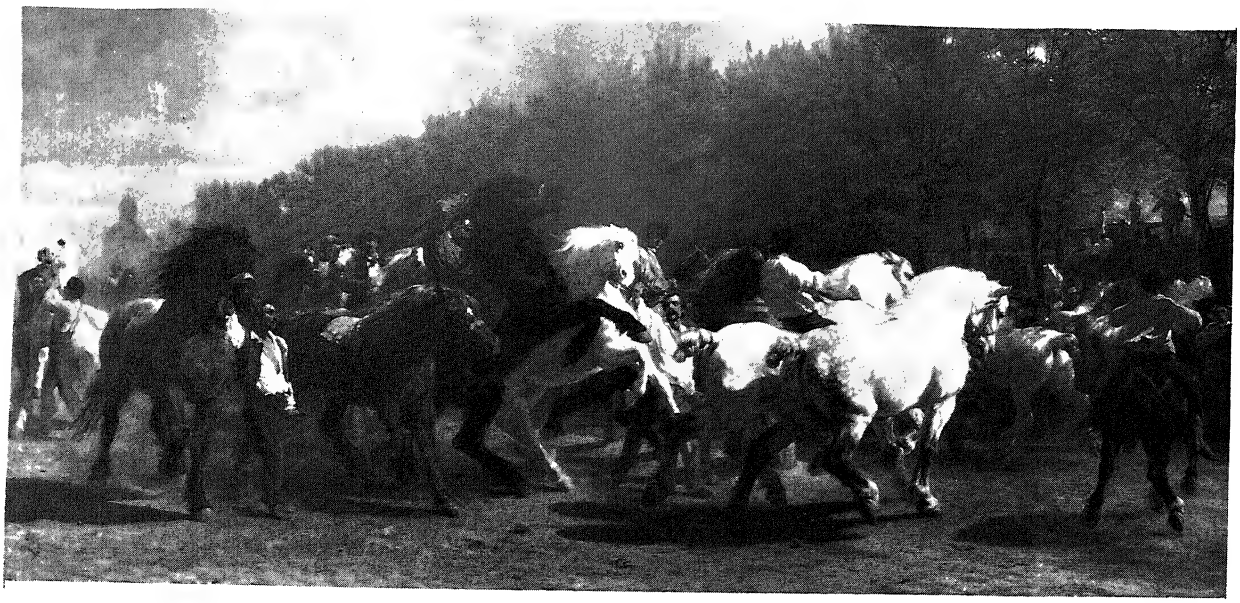
Finally, Louis Pierre Henriquel-Dupont (1797–1892), was an engraver. He has some genuine historical importance since, after studying with Guérin as a very young man and then with an equally classical engraver, Bervic, he revolted against classical technique to develop a freer, more vigorous one. Thus in his small way he is a counterpart of Delacroix, the difference being that Delacroix was a creative artist as well as a technical innovator.

If we omit Ingres and Delacroix as great painters and Meissonier as an offensive one, this is a good sound list of accomplished wielders of the brush, boring rather than vicious. Its main fault is not its inclusions but its omissions. As a list of the living Frenchmen supreme among painters in 1855 it will not do. The most conspicuous absentees are Courbet, Daumier, and Corot. No jury can be held accountable for the re-evaluations of time, and a century has elapsed since 1855. But it should not have taken a crystal ball to see that Courbet was a better painter than, say, the genial and suave Vernet. And if Daumier was painting virtually in secret, it was because the Salon standard was so inimical to his genius that he did not find a public.

Salon awards were graduated downward from the Grand Medal of Honor through Medals First, Second, and Third Class, with the usual sop of Honorable Mentions at the bottom. In the long list of winners in these lower classes more names have endured and some became even more conspicuous in the Salon than the Grand Medallists above. Yet all the winners of the Grand Medal of Honor are at least hazily familiar names to anyone who has spent much time with the history of painting, while among the other awards, even the Medals First Class, there are utter strangers even to the specialist. Occasionally some one investigates these men, hoping to discover and revive a neglected painter of merit. So far no one has struck gold.

Medals First Class, 1855

Corot was recognized in the second rank of awards with a Medal First Class, and one went to Théodore Rousseau (who in 1867 was even to win a Medal of Honor). The jury's report lists forty-eight Medals First Class, thirty-two of them to French painters, seven to painters of the United

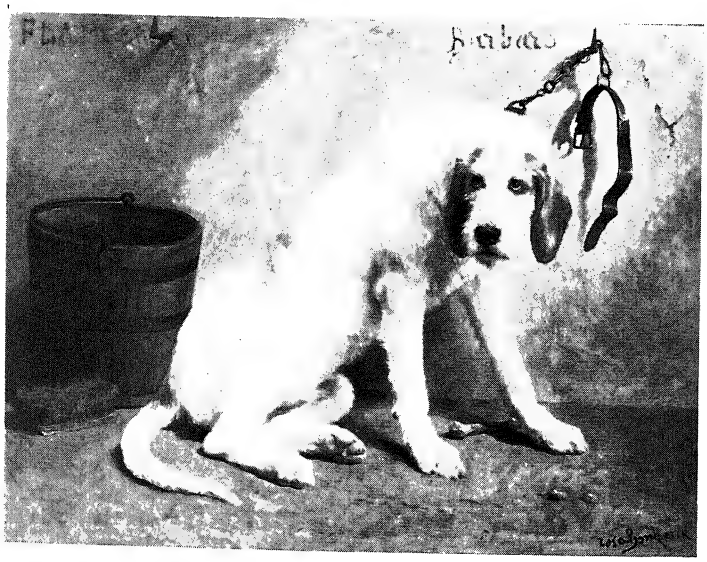


167. BONHEUR: *The Horse Fair*, 1853–55. 96 x 200". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Cornelius Vanderbilt.

Kingdom, and the rest scattered around other European countries. Among the other First Medalists, several are still familiar names:

Rosa Bonheur (1822–1899), who was an unusual woman, still has a following, especially in America where her *Horse Fair* [167] is perpetually admired. She was a child prodigy and exhibited in the Salon when only nineteen years old. By 1848, when she was twenty-six, she had already won a Medal First Class. In 1853 she came conspicuously into public favor with *The Horse Fair*, which was very large to have been painted by a woman and might have attracted attention even if it had been painted by a man. There was nothing feminine about Rosa Bonheur's painting, and there were many unfeminine aspects to her deportment. Like the lady romantic writer who adopted a man's name, George Sand, Rosa Bonheur affected men's clothes upon occasion. She was an admirer of Sand, and lived her own life freely with some of the same romantic flair. She knew everyone. She painted animals with great knowledge and sympathy. In many ways her work is arresting, but in the end she is a veterinarian, not an artist. She never made Landseer's mistake of trying to turn her animals into noble human beings, but now and then she showed them involved in their own emotional difficulties, as in *Barbaro after the Hunt* [168]. She painted with a heavy, rich pigment and might have found a

168. BONHEUR: *Barbaro after the Hunt*, date unknown. 38 x 51¼". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Wilstach Collection.



169. FLANDRIN: *Study of Male Nude*, exhibited 1855. 38½ x 48¾". Louvre, Paris.

source for this in Géricault. Toward the end of her life, which coincided with the end of the century, she tried to bring her work into line with that of the impressionists, who were the modern painters of her old age. She did not succeed, but her attempt indicates an admirable open-mindedness and a continuation of the determinedly unfeminine vigor that was her most individual characteristic among women painters.

Alexandre Cabanel (1823–1889), was another *Prix de Rome* winner whose life was a succession of triumphs. Later he twice won the Grand Medal of Honor, in 1865 and 1867. He was an extremely fashionable painter. Since one of his paintings [191] is considered later in some detail, this is enough about him here.

Léon Cogniet (1794–1880), was also a *Prix de Rome* man, five years older than Delacroix and like Delacroix a student of Guérin's. Unlike Delacroix he remained a loyal follower in Guérin's classical manner. Since this manner was already watered down in Guérin's work, its further dilution in Cogniet's leaves very little substance. Cogniet was a weak colorist and a routine composer. He was one of those painters who never advance beyond the stage of favorite pupil. Like others of this type he spent his life as a teacher of rules just as he had learned them. Meissonier studied under him; so did Rosa Bonheur.

Hippolyte Jean Flandrin (1809–1864), was a disciple of Ingres. Ingres once threatened to resign from the Academy when the Salon jury refused one of Flandrin's paintings. Occasionally Flandrin approximated Ingres's quality, and he left one study of a male nude [169] of an arresting sensuousness that has made it a great favorite in the Louvre. But in searching for a style of his own by following a series of enthusiasms Flandrin failed to develop very far in any of them. And the one in which he developed farthest, a modified troubadourism, was not the most fortunate choice he could have made.

Federigo de Madrazo (1815–1894), a Spaniard, dominated Spanish official art as a history and portrait painter. He was a brilliant success as a painter of the Spanish aristocrats, was much honored officially in France also, and painted in a bright, flashy manner.

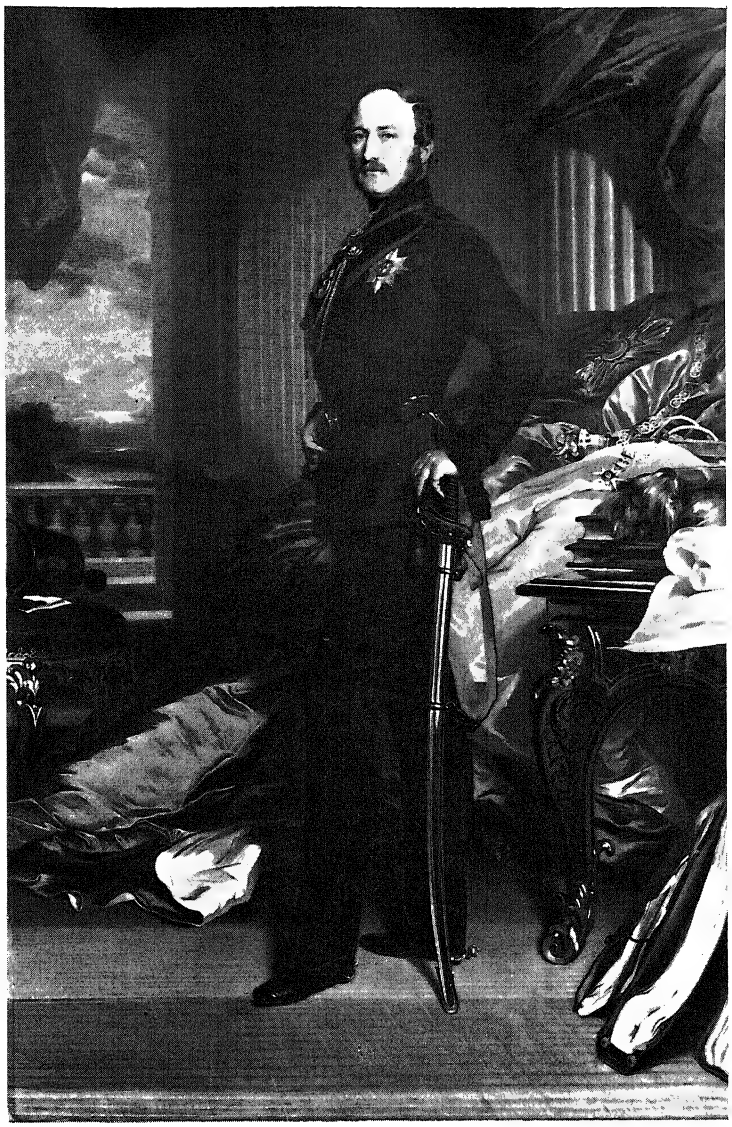
Karl Ernest Rodolphe Heinrich Salem Lehmann (1814–1882) is less impressive than his name. Born in Kiel, a naturalized Frenchman, a pupil first of his father and then of Ingres, he followed the classical formulas with such dryness and so obsessively that even his contemporaries found him limited in this way. Nevertheless he won Medals First Class in 1840 and 1848 as well as in 1855. He founded a prize to encourage the defense of the academic tradition. Possibly it is still awarded.

Joseph Nicolas Robert-Fleury (1797–1890), was a student of Girodet and Gros. Following at a safe distance behind the romantic vanguard, he capitalized on its successes whenever they could be made palatable to bourgeois taste. His career was a succession of official honors and sinecures culminating in the directorship of the Academy's School of Fine Arts and then the directorship of the Academy in Rome.

With Constant Troyon (1810–1865) we come to a curious phenomenon: the cow in nineteenth-century French painting. Before his discovery of this animal's potential as

170. TROYON: *Cows Grazing*, 1856. 24 x 32¼". Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.

an art subject, Troyon had already put behind him a successful career as a painter of landscape in the Barbizon spirit, and as was mentioned earlier he is ordinarily grouped with that school. At twenty-three Troyon made his debut in the Salon; at twenty-nine he was awarded a Medal Third Class and at thirty a Medal Second Class. At thirty-one he had a real Salon success with a picture of Tobias and the Angel in a landscape, which was praised by the perceptive and sophisticated critic Théophile Gautier and at the same time admired by the public. In 1846 Troyon reached the award of Medal First Class. The following year he visited Belgium, where he discovered the works of two seventeenth-century painters, Albert Cuyp and Paul Potter, whose landscapes were backgrounds for various domestic animals, especially cows. From that time on, cows and, to a lesser degree, sheep preoccupied Troyon. He painted them standing in pools, grazing in meadows, entering the fold, leaving the fold, and sometimes just doing nothing at all. He was the best—for he was an excellent painter—of a considerable group of artists dedicated to the cow. They found a ready market for their work. The cow in the living room became a familiar item. The success of these pictures may have been a result of increasing urbanization, a bourgeois nostalgia for the countryside as cities became more crowded, more complicated, more mechanized. Critics praised Troyon's mastery of the anatomy of the cow with as much seriousness as they praised other painters' mastery of the nude. Whatever the explanation for his fascination with the cow, and if we forgive him some inevitable repetitiousness, Troyon was skillful in disposing these creatures pleasantly in landscapes of grassy charm under skies of agreeable tints [170]. His Medal First Class of 1855 was his third; he won a fourth in 1859. He seems to have been a generous and agreeable man, with much of the placidity characteristic of his favorite subject.



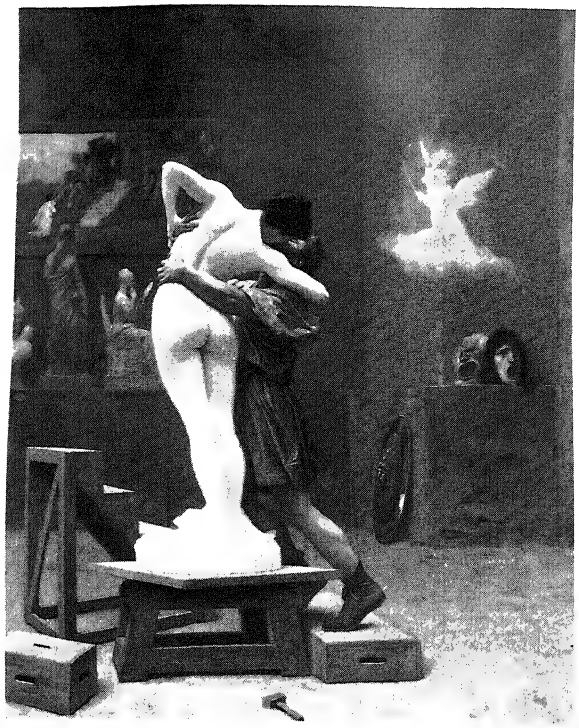
171. WINTERHALTER: *Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, c.* 1846. 94 x 61". National Portrait Gallery, London.

Finally, among the First Medallists whose names are still familiar, there was Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1806–1873), a German by birth but a cosmopolitan by nature and experience. A portraitist, he traveled from court to court all over Europe. There was hardly a king or queen or person of great title whom he did not paint at one time or another [171]. It is easy to see why he was so sought after. His women have a melting loveliness and his men an aristocratic male elegance leading to the conclusion that European nobility of the mid-nineteenth century were a special race of unparalleled physical beauty. Winterhalter was one of those portraitists, most frequent in England, with a knack for retaining a likeness while beautifying the subject. His portraits still have great appeal in their decorative and triumphantly superficial way. Like many other painters who do not have much to say but do not pretend to be saying more than they can, Winterhalter is an enjoyable painter when accepted on his own premises.

One eminent painter, Thomas Couture (1815–1879), was awarded a Medal First Class but refused it, indignant because it was not a Grand Medal of Honor. A pupil of Gros, then of Delaroche, Couture was a *Prix de Rome* winner and made a successful Salon debut at twenty-three with a picture entitled *Young Venetian after an Orgy*. He was only thirty-two in 1847 when he won a Medal First Class with his *Romans of the Decadence* [178], another post-orgy scene that is such a perfect example of the academic concoction at its typical best that it is generally used today as an illustration when a single specimen must stand alone to typify the breed. Couture was a painter of great talent, little imagination, and a vast intolerance. We will see more of him and his *Romans of the Decadence* shortly.

Medals Second Class, 1855

In the longer list of Medals Second Class there are fewer names of importance. Two are somewhat younger men. Jean Léon Gérôme (1824–1904) lived into the twentieth century, as did Adolphe William Bouguereau (1825–1905). Just now the reputations of both these painters are at lowest ebb. With Meissonier they have become synonymous with the vicious tyranny of the academic formula in the latter half of the century, with its sterility, dogma, hypocrisy, and above all its selfishness and its blindness in the face of new developments. All this is true, so true that even the moderate virtues these men possess are usually denied them. But occasionally, and



172. GÉRÔME: *Pygmalion and Galatea,* date unknown. 35 x 27". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Louis C. Raegner.

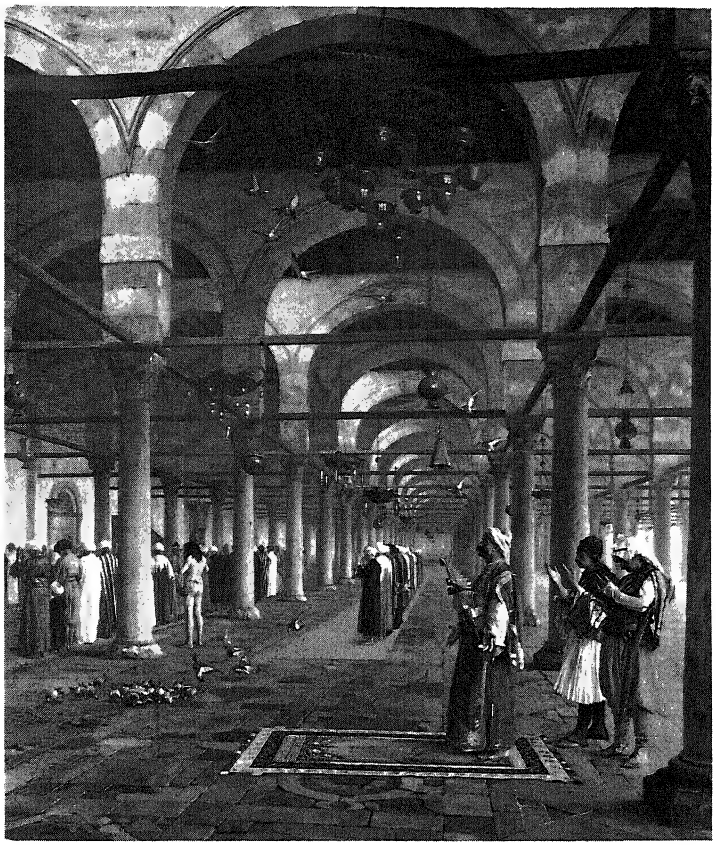
173. DAUMIER: *Pygmalion,* 1842. From the series *Histoire Ancienne.* Lithograph, 9 x 7½". Collection Carl Zigrosser, Philadelphia.

most tentatively, they are given a small kind word in recent criticism. This is especially true of Gérôme.

Gérôme was a painter who pushed the slick painting surface to its limit, and he was as handy as Meissonier with highlights on buttons. According to some accounts he was also nearly as odious a personality. But he was more of an artist. He was just as fascinated with technical display in details but he was more selective in their use. He had a sense of color—for Meissonier, one color was just about as good as another—and among the multitude of his paintings (for like other successful Salon painters he was extremely productive for an insatiable market) from time to time a work of surprising attraction occurs.

The slick, tight, surface typical of so much academic painting harks back to David's, as in *The Horatii.* Gérôme, in his *Pygmalion and Galatea* [172], a wonderful and terrible picture, is painting a classical subject with a high polish, but we are a long way from the master of the Revolution and even further from Ingres. Neither the vigorous anatomical naturalism of *The Horatii* nor the sensuous idealization of a nude by Ingres has left a mark on this descendant, although the figures have been drawn with acute naturalism and then prettified. *Pygmalion* is a consummately obvious and vulgar picture.

The story is that of the young sculptor Pygmalion. Having done a marble statue of Galatea, he falls in love with his own work, which is brought to life by Venus, who has observed the young man's plight. Gérôme's statue-woman is painted in rosy flesh pinks in the upper parts where life has suffused it, and fades out gradually to pure marble white in the feet, where the process of vivification has hardly begun. Salon audiences found this tour de force ravish-



174. GÉRÔME: *Prayer in the Mosque of 'Amr, Old Cairo,* perhaps 1860. 35 x 29½". Metropolitan Museum of Art, Wolfe Bequest.

ing, but time has not been gentle with the picture. Its pretensions and affectations are mercilessly revealed and even the nude girl, once captivating, looks a little comical since fashions in feminine loveliness have changed. It is extraordinary that a public with access to Daumier's hilarious burlesque of the same subject [173] could ever take Gérôme seriously again, but they continued to do so.

Salon painters were sometimes pseudo-classical, sometimes pseudo-romantic, but always genuinely opportunistic. Orientalism had long ceased to be a scandal and was popular in all kinds of treatments. Gérôme painted Oriental subjects without any expression of their mystery, their turbulence, or even essentially of their exoticism, in paradoxical combination with his tight pseudo-neo-Davidian style. He was a master at the rendition of the silks, brasses, jewels, and other rich stuffs and objects of the Near East. Usually he used them as knickknacks to trick out some foolish anecdote, some trivial little story for the Salon public to read, but occasionally, as in *Prayer in the Mosque* [174] he seems to become another painter and his trivia coalesce into a picture that rises above them.

Prayer in the Mosque is more than a straight reproduction of an inherently interesting subject. The colors are beautifully modulated, juxtaposed in combinations of unexpected distinction; the figures are skillfully disposed within the space, the monotony of their long stretch back into deep perspective being broken here and there most judiciously; the airy columns of the mosque have an abstract interest beyond their interest as exotic architecture. Even when we admit that these volumes are inherent in the structure and not an invention of the artist, it is still true that Gérôme has made the most of them.

Like Gérôme, Bouguereau went on from his Medal Second Class in 1855 to the Grand Medal of Honor and the whole category of official awards. The birth and death dates of these two academicians coincided within a year, and each was a resounding commercial success on both sides of the Atlantic. Even more than Gérôme's, Bouguereau's name has become synonymous with the prostitution of technical prowess to any saleable subject. Whether he was painting high-class barroom nudes or holy pictures, Bouguereau was breathtakingly adept at assuming appropriate masks to conceal the meretriciousness of his conception. Whether painting nymphs and satyrs or *Youth and Cupid* [175] to titillate bourgeois sexuality or madonnas appealing to associative religious ideas in much the same way, Bouguereau was such a skillful performer that the buying public saw no inconsistency in the work of a man who alternated between the roles of lecher and mystic. And indeed there is no inconsistency here, since in neither role was Bouguereau an expressive artist: he was a salesman with an infallible eye for the market. But he was a technician of such prowess, in a style soft and slick at the same time,

that anyone who is at all interested in paintings can hardly fail to respond to one by Bouguereau as a performance, no matter what he may think of it as a work of art. No matter how clearly one sees that *The Thank Offering* [176] is sentimentalized to the point of nausea, its technical aplomb remains staggering.

The wonder of a painting by Bouguereau is that it is so completely, so absolutely, all of a piece. Not a single element is out of harmony with the whole; there is not a flaw in the totality of the union between conception and execution. This, of course, is a requirement for any great work of art. The trouble with Bouguereau's perfection is that the conception and the execution are perfectly false. Yet this is perfection of a kind, even if it is a perverse kind, and Bouguereau is proof that the art of painting is so various and so complex that even "bad" pictures can be fascinating when considered as part of the whole of man's record of his own nature.

A Medal Third Class also went to Théodore Chassériau (1819–1856), who had begun as a student of Ingres and then had been attracted by the colorism and exoticism of Delacroix. He managed to fuse some of the sinuous grace of his first master with the warmth and light of romanticism; before his relatively early death he had developed a hybrid style of decorative attraction, which he displayed especially in murals.

The Salon Public

What, in summary, do all these pictures reveal as to the taste of the *bourgeoisie*, the new public of picture buyers? First of all, that a painting must in some way be ostentatious. It must pretend to a kind of profundity or sensibility, and it must do so without violating the veneer of shallow proprieties that passed for morality. If a specific moral lesson can be incorporated or implied, so much the better, but it must be a moral lesson flattering to bourgeois convenience. These components of a picture must be immediately apparent on the picture's surface; they must not be reached via some philosophical bridge. This ordinarily means that the picture must tell a story of some kind. It must not exist simply as a painting; it must be a picture *of* something. That is why the Salon painter was a narrator first and a painter second. The public wanted pictures they could read as they would read stories or tracts.

175. Bouguereau: *Youth and Cupid,* 1877. 75½ x 35". Louvre, Paris.

176. Bouguereau: *The Thank Offering*, 1867. 58 x 42¼". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Wilstach Collection.

Whether or not he was conscious that he was doing so, the Salon painter sought to flatter the public. Continually, by implication, he assured them of their sensitivity, their cultivation, their intellect, their nobility of soul, their moral probity. The more this flattery was rewarded—by purchases—the more intense it became, and the more intense it became, the more it was rewarded by further purchases, in a vicious downward spiral. It must be remembered too that as the Salons became bigger and bigger the public was educated to lower and lower standards. Thousands of pictures were exhibited in each Salon, and there simply never are thousands of great painters alive at any one time, especially in any one country, even when the country is France. But all these thousands of pictures received the official stamp as great art. In these circumstances it is not surprising that by the 1860's, when the impressionists appeared, the public was offended by pictures painted in a revolutionary technique, pictures whose virtues ran counter to all the Salon vices that for so long had been mistaken for virtues of an elevated kind.

But to this summary of a depressing situation the reminder should be added that Delacroix, Ingres, and Corot were also alive and successful (Courbet, as well, was successful in his special way) and a generation of painters just then clearing their 'teens was assimilating the various contributions made by these giants of the first half of the century. Ingres's exquisite control and his respect for tradition; Delacroix's revolution of color and his insistence that the painter is independent of formula; Courbet's rejection of the ideal and the faraway in favor of the everyday world around us; and Corot's demonstration that the painter's private world could be explored to yield images of universal meaning—the young men who were to be known eventually as the impressionists were ready to build from these contributions, assimilating them without imitating the forms they had taken in the art of the great men of the first half of the century. The battle against academic dogma was a bitter one, and literally it very nearly cost some of the young impressionists their lives. But before the end of the century their victory was decisive.

CHAPTER 6

Manet

The "Salon des Refusés"

The year 1863 is the sharpest dividing line in the history of painting since the French Revolution. It is the year of the *Salon des Refusés*—the Salon of the Rejected Painters. It centered around a painter named Édouard Manet (1832–1883).

It had been almost exactly a century since David had been admitted as a student of the Royal Academy. Now, within a decade, the leaders of classicism, romanticism, and realism disappeared, as if the decks were being cleared for a new generation of painters ready to make use of everything that had been discovered during a hundred years of revolutions and counter-revolutions. Ingres and Delacroix died; so did Rousseau; Courbet was in exile. The conflicts between one ism and another no longer seemed important to a group of young men who admired Ingres for certain virtues, Delacroix for others, Courbet for yet others, without feeling that the theories these men had defended were mutually exclusive. All three were admired and followed; so was Goya; so were the eighteenth-century court painters whose artificiality Goya and David had rejected. The art of the Venetian Renaissance was studied with new excitement. The young painters were learning from everything and imitating nobody.

But the academicians had learned nothing, and were still imitating themselves. In 1863 the Salon jury finally overstepped all bounds in its spite and favoritism; the trading of votes, the reactionary prejudices, were this time too flagrant to be tolerated. More than 4,000 paintings were rejected by a jury that seems to have been domi-

nated by a forgotten pedant named Signol, a teacher at the *École des Beaux Arts*. The rejected painters and their supporters stirred up so much agitation that the Emperor stepped into the fracas. To judge from the kind of picture he was accustomed to buying for himself and as gifts for distinguished visitors, his taste in painting was in accord with the jury's. But as a politician in a country where art was a part of national life, Napoleon III could not ignore a group of artists and intellectuals that was growing as large as the Academy and its hangers-on—and making more noise. The revolt of the students who had petitioned Courbet to open a studio had occurred only two years before, in 1861. And in 1862 a commission had been appointed to look into the organization and policies of the Academy's school in Paris, its branch in Rome, and its Salon regulations. Ignoring these straws in the wind, the jury of 1863 kept on course and now found itself in rough weather. The Count de Nieuwerkerke, who seemed triply invulnerable as Director General of Museums, Superintendent of Fine Arts, and titular president of the jury, was summoned by the Emperor and ordered to give the rejected pictures a showing.

The official announcement of this unpleasantness was mild, stated not as a rebuke to the jury but only as a decision of the Emperor's to authorize a second Salon made up of paintings rejected from the regular one, in order to give the public a chance to judge for itself the legitimacy of the complaints that had reached him. This was sensational enough. By implication it was an official admission that academic judgment was not infallible. By implication-once-removed it was even more heretical: it made way for the premise that there is no single standard of excellence, no single formula by which the excellence of a painting may be calculated.

Having thus laid themselves open to public trial, the academicians set about gathering their forces to insure the failure of the *Salon des Refusés*. Meanwhile the rejected painters were in a quandary. Under the terms of the Emperor's order, they had two weeks in which to withdraw their pictures if they wanted to. At the end of that time the remaining pictures would be hung in other rooms near the Salon proper in the Palace of Industry, a vast structure built for the 1855 Exposition where the Salons were now being held. A few years before, a painter named Bonvin had arranged in his studio a small show of rejected works by various painters. This miniature preliminary *Salon des Refusés* had met with a scandalous reception, although some painters, including Courbet (whose own exhibition of rejected pictures in the Pavilion of Realism had been a failure), had spoken up for it. With this precedent the painters' dilemma was whether to risk a similar reception, whether to lay themselves open to the vindictiveness of future Salon juries, whether to exhibit in the humiliating role of a rejected painter against the odds that the exhibition would be a popular success, or whether to play safe by withdrawing. In the end most of the painters decided to risk it and only about 600 paintings were withdrawn, not a large proportion of those that had been refused.

The exhibition was both a success and a failure. Throngs crowded into it but not many people came to "judge for themselves the legitimacy of the complaints." Eager for the relaxation of a good laugh after the annual cultural exercise of the Salon proper, the public made the most of a double opportunity to demonstrate artistic perception, first by the usual appreciation of the accepted works, then by the derision—always so easy and so reassuring to the derider—of the rejected ones. The popular critics had a field day at the expense of the rejected painters, although an occasional picture was singled out for sympathetic comment even in the conventional press. The minority support was fervent; a painter and writer named Zacharie Astruc even founded a paper, issued every day during the run of the Salon, to defend the good pictures among the rejected ones, especially Manet's.

All in all, in terms of the moment, the *Salon des Refusés* was not a great success. It did not immediately impair academic prestige with the general public. But the public's easy scorn, the critical diatribes

in the press, even the persecutions that the Academy continued to inflict on painters of originality, are not of importance in comparison with the fact that after 1863 the mortal illness of the academic organization was apparent to any good diagnostician. No matter that it took a long time to die, no matter that it grew increasingly vicious during its invalidism, its ultimate death as the dominant force in French painting was certain and the nature of its malady was recognized.

The *Salon des Refusés* established roots for the idea that every painter has the right to paint as he pleases and to be judged as an individual by other individuals, instead of painting according to the rules of a school whose officials have the power to grant or deny him the right to be seen. Delacroix and Courbet had fought for this idea, but they had been immune to the Salon's weapon of rejection, Delacroix by his mysterious influential connections and Courbet through the fluke of his early medal. The *Salon des Refusés* was a mass exhibition of painters who would ordinarily have been helpless against the esthetic censorship of the Salon system. Painters were achieving their own equivalent of freedom of speech.

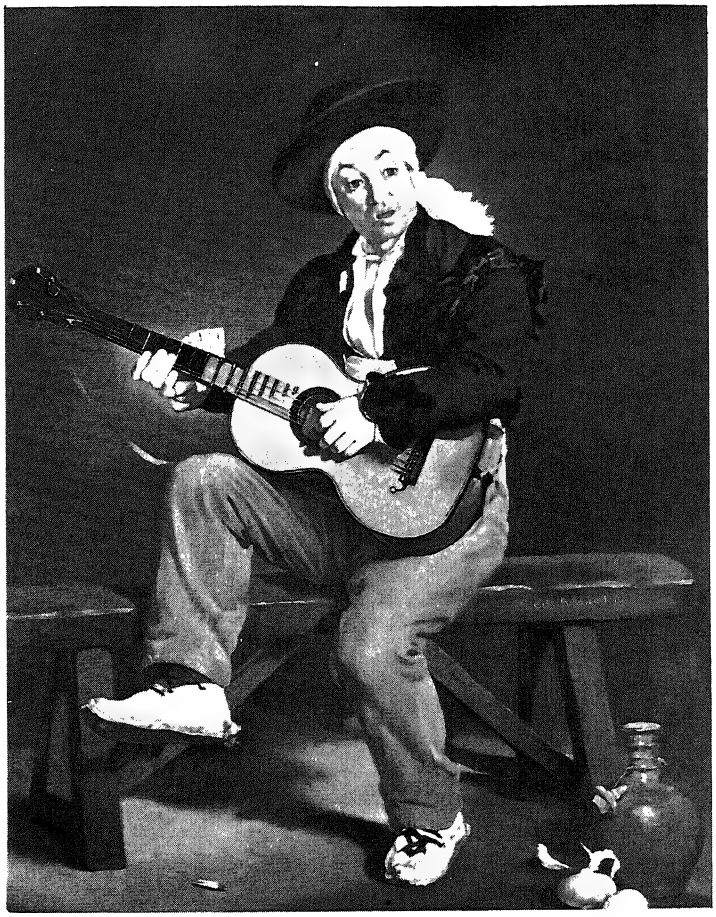
The *Salon des Refusés* was no collection of masterpieces, and it must have included some really appalling pictures among the hundreds that legitimately had been turned down by the jury as inadequate attempts to meet academic standards. If the two exhibitions could be reassembled side by side today, they would probably look much alike, except that the technical polish of the officially accepted pictures would be higher over-all than that of the rejected ones, and the rejected ones would be studded here and there with early works of men who have become recognized as the masters of the last half of the century. The most conspicuous of these paintings would be three by Manet: *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* and *Mlle. V. in the Costume of an Espada,* both of which would have to be borrowed from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* [181], which would have to be borrowed from the Louvre.

"Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe": Scandal

It was *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* that everyone came to see and laugh at or rail against. The Emperor himself made it a four-star attraction by calling it immodest, and the critics attacked it in downright scurrilous terms. Manet suffered deeply from these attacks because the last thing he wanted was notoriety through a *succés de scandale.* Well-to-do, suave, cultivated, worldly, and socially conventional, Manet coveted a conventional success and to the end of his life he sought it in the Salon.

Two years before the *Salon des Refusés* he had seemed on the way to what he wanted. That year, at twenty-nine, he had submitted two pictures, one of them a portrait of his parents and the other a *Spanish Guitar Player* [177]. The pictures were not only accepted but attracted so much favorable attention that the *Spanish Guitar Player* was taken down and rehung in a better spot. Manet received an honorable mention (a puny award but a beginning) and by the time the Salon closed he had established himself as a young painter who would be watched.

Manet's technique in both pictures, especially the *Spanish Guitar Player,* was open to the same objections that were to be made later when his work was howled down. The public, who spontaneously enjoyed the pictures, would then no doubt have joined in the attack. The public is never very conscious of technical aberrations so long as the end result is a recognizable image of a subject it enjoys. It enjoyed Manet's portrait of his parents because portraits of an artist's parents appeal to the admirable moral sentiment of filial devotion. And the *Spanish Guitar Player* had the attraction of a picturesque subject, even though Manet had not presented it in a picturesque way. Throughout the history of Manet's lifelong struggle with the Salon, the public obviously followed the critics' cue to damn on technical grounds pictures that otherwise it would have enjoyed for their subjects, pictures that it would just as quickly have followed a cue to praise.



177. MANET: *Spanish Guitar Player*, 1860. 57 x 44⅝". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of William Church Osborn.

Just two months before the 1863 Salon, which was to result in the *Salon des Refusés*, Manet made a tactical error by exhibiting fourteen pictures in the gallery of a dealer named Martinet. For some reason the critics were hostile and suspicious. They prophesied that when the Salon opened Manet would fail to repeat his first success, if he got into the Salon at all. While this should not have affected a normal jury, it is easy to believe that the reactionary jury of 1863 was already looking forward to rejecting the paintings of a young artist who had been cocky enough to exhibit so conspicuously to the public just before the Salon's pronouncements for the year. The easy thing to do was to annihilate the upstart, and the jury annihilated Manet. It is probable that Delacroix had had something to do with Manet's good fortune in his first Salon, but in 1863 Delacroix was too ill to participate in the judging. The jury met in the spring; Delacroix died the following August.

If the jury hoped for a chance to reject him, Manet made it easy for them with *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*. The other two pictures that fell under the ax with it, *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* and *Mlle. V. in the Costume of an Espada*, were not too different from the successful *Spanish Guitar Player*, but *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* is a startling picture even today. In an ordinary bit of woods, a matter-of-fact young woman has inexplicably removed her clothing while a pair of fully dressed young men lounge indifferently near by and another young woman, draped in a chemise, bathes in a pool just beyond. The picture was listed in the catalogue as *Le Bain* (*The Bath*), but immediately acquired the title by which it is still known. None of the possible translations—"Breakfast on the Grass" or "Luncheon on the Grass" which are equally used, or "Picnic" which never is—seems quite satisfactory. The subject is an adaptation in contemporary dress of the venerable tradition of demonstration pictures showing figures in a landscape, a synthesis of nudes, nature, and still life as an exhibition of skill. But Manet's painting differs from other such pictures in having not the thinnest disguise of allegory or idealization. It is extremely direct, to the point of brashness, and purely a demonstration of painting, without anecdotal or moralistic veneer of any kind. The dissociation between painter and subject is just about as complete as is possible. To the confused and offended jury, who had never seen anything like it, the directness seemed not only brash, but insolent. The total divorce from moral pretensions, being incomprehensible to people accustomed to reading moral platitudes into painting, seemed immoral in itself.

The public and critical damnation of *Le Déjeuner* is altogether indefensible in retrospect, but we might be generous and pause for a moment to try to see the picture as it looked to a startled art lover in 1863.

178. COUTURE: *The Romans of the Decadence,* 1847. 181 x 304". Louvre, Paris.

In the middle of the twentieth century this demands as great an effort as would have been required in another direction in the middle of the nineteenth. As a reminder of what the public expected and had been educated to think of as the proper thing in art, an examination of Thomas Couture's *The Romans of the Decadence* [178] is chastening. The picture had been the Salon sensation of 1847 and since then had been accepted as a masterpiece that would, quite naturally in the normal course of events, take its place among the great masterpieces of the past. Manet himself had chosen Couture as his teacher and had worked with him off and on for five years. Remembering that it is always easier to scoff at pictures in their declining years than to discover in them reasons for the virtues formerly ascribed to them, let us be patient with *The Romans of the Decadence:*

It is a compendium of popular demands. For one thing, it is cultural. Something cultural is implied by the title, which flatteringly assumes that the observer is familiar with Roman history. (And what in the world could be cultural about the subject of *Le Déjeuner?*) Moralistically the subject is treated on a high plane; one is invited to disapprove of the decadence of these people, who orgiastically defile a noble hall filled with statues of their sturdier forefathers. (Are we asked by Manet to disapprove of the action of his young woman who has disrobed so casually? No; he seems to accept it as the most natural thing in the world.) And *The Romans of the Decadence* is an impeccable piece of painting by a standard requiring careful drawing, complicated elaborations, and studio poses accurately rendered (whereas, once the critics had pointed it out, it was obvious that *Le Déjeuner* was painted in a way devoid of subtleties, refinements, and difficult detail; this scoundrelly artist must have turned it out in an hour or so, like a sign painter).

179. MANET: Detail from Figure 181.

180. COURBET: Detail from Figure 119.

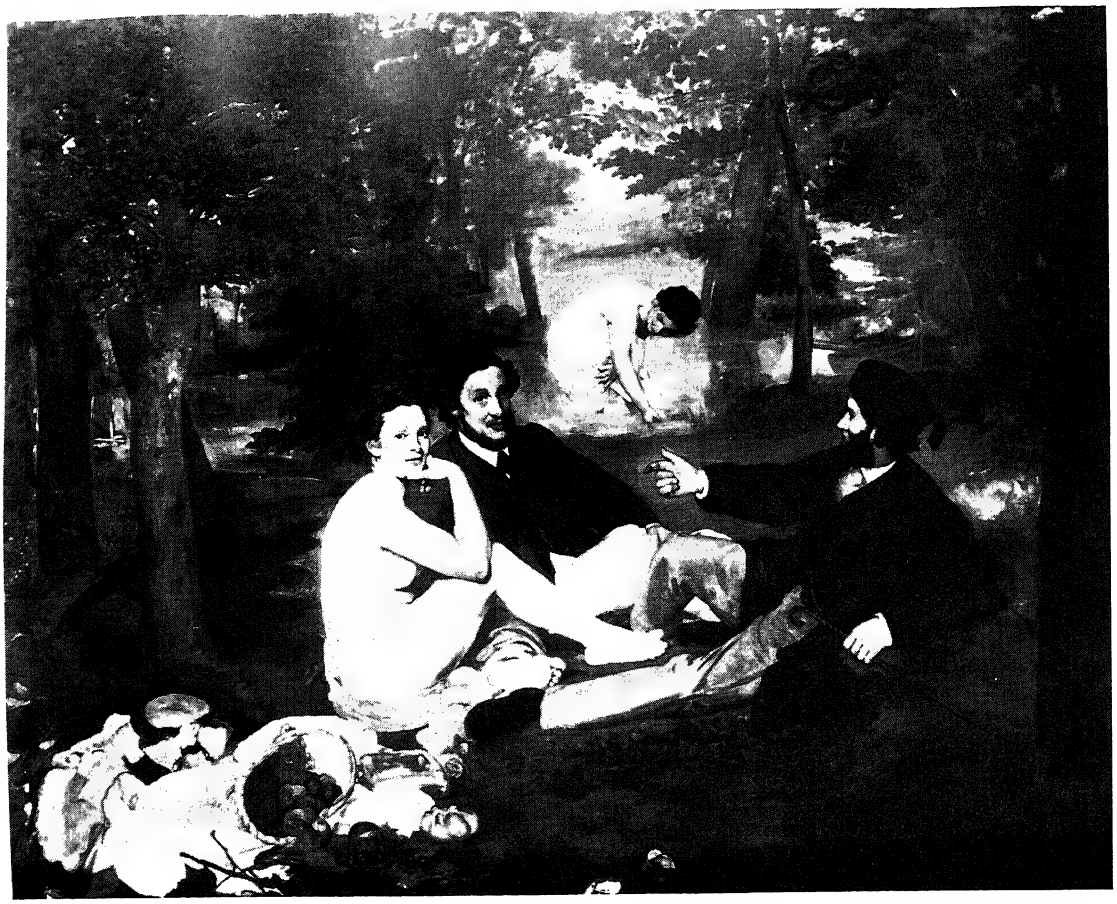
It is easy to see now that the culture in *The Romans of the Decadence* is specious; that its moral overtones are combined with lascivious suggestion, allowing one to disapprove of the decadents while relishing vicariously their languishing indulgences; that while it obviously took hours and days and weeks to execute, it is technically static —that is, it is a repetitious exercise, copybook fashion—where *Le Déjeuner* is inventive, explorative, and far from "easy" or careless although the difficulties overcome by the painter are less apparent to the untrained eye.

They were not apparent at all to a public accustomed to taking it for granted that in a picture of *Le Déjeuner*'s dimensions the artist's job was to show how closely he could approximate the perfections of the academic formula. Not picturesque, not historical, and not anecdotal, *Le Déjeuner* seemed unexplainable except as a work of an incompetent or a madman or, worst of all, a prankster. The popular critics were no help to the public, since they made no effort to understand what Manet was doing and even went out of their way to entrench their minds against understanding.

"Le Déjeuner": Technical Innovations

And exactly what was Manet doing?

At this time he had seen very little of Goya's painting, yet he was pushing to their conclusion the same problems of representation Goya had set himself, quite as if Goya had served him as an intermediate step in the solution. Manet is more systematic and more objective than Goya, but like him Manet wants to capture the immediacy of instant vision. Like him, Manet does so by reducing the image to essential planes painted in bold, flat areas. He goes beyond Goya in the elimination of transitional areas where planes merge from light into shadow through a series of half tones, those areas that are neither light nor shadow but somewhere in between the two as the form curves away from the source of illumination. The nude in *Le Déjeuner* is all but devoid of transitional tones, and the shadows are reduced to a minimum. It is as if the lights had spread, consuming all intermediate values and compressing the shadows into areas so small and concentrated that they may even be reduced to a mere



181. MANET: *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe,* 1863. 84¼ x 106¼". Louvre, Paris.

182. GIORGIONE: *Concert Champêtre, c.* 1510. 43¼ x 54⅜". Louvre, Paris.

dark line along one side of the form. This is most dramatically apparent if the head of this nude [179] is compared with one of the heads from Courbet's *Two Girls on the Banks of the Seine* [180]. Courbet capitalizes on modulated half tones to give his image weight and mood; Manet eliminates them to reveal the image as the eye might receive it in one brilliant flash of light. Manet may have been influenced by effects in early photographs where the primitive emulsion, incapable of registering half tones, reduced infinite gradations to similar broad uninterrupted areas of light and sharp concentrations of dark. It would be appropriate for Manet, the most implacably objective of painters, to find a point of departure in the absolute objectivity of images

183. RAIMONDI, after RAPHAEL: *Judgment of Paris*. Engraving, 11½ x 17¼". Philadelphia Museum of Art.

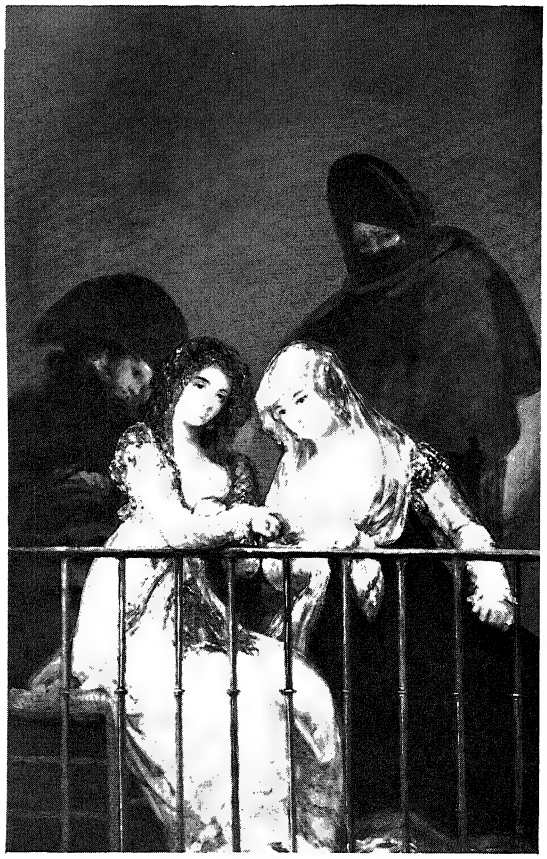
produced by the operation of physical laws.

In addition to its effectiveness as formal description with a vivid immediacy, this quick, summary modeling offered advantages in the use of color. The broad light areas of Manet's forms could be painted in colors at full intensity over their whole breadth, whereas in conventional modeling the color would have had to be debased by darkening and graying where it began to turn into the intermediate tones between light and shadow. At the same time Manet frequently exaggerated the blackish and grayish tones in the shadows themselves. Reduced to such small areas, blacks and grays served to emphasize the broad expanses of color in the lights, allowing them to sing out above the darks. In comparison with the dulled tints of conventional painting or even with the bright, but broken, color of Delacroix, Manet's broad areas and large spots of color, flatly applied, seemed barbarous. Conventional painters were also deeply offended because Manet painted his forms in flat silhouettes of color and then brushed his shadows into them while they were wet. The usual way was to define the darks first and then progress into the lights, which might be painted over them. There are technical advantages to this conventional method that need not be gone into here, but it is worth mentioning that this minor deviation from standard technique was attacked as a serious heresy, in the general condemnation of everything Manet did or did not do.

Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe [181] is not a perfect picture. The figures are poorly integrated with their setting; they have the air of having been cut out of another picture and pasted onto this landscape where by lucky coincidence they almost fit and in a way this is what actually happened. Manet made studies from nature for the landscape but painted the models in the studio without reference to natural light. Also he has left a bothersome ambiguity in the transition between the foreground and the middleground where the second young woman bathes. The trees around her, and the rowboat just discernible at the right, where it is drawn up to the bank of the stream, are miniature ones, or else the bathing girl is a giantess. It is impossible to establish a logical relationship between the receding vista of woods in the left third of the picture, and the vista behind the bather. But if the picture does not hang together in all its parts, its major individual parts are superb. In the nude figure and the tumbled still life of fruit, bread, and discarded clothing Manet is already painting at full power in the manner that will shortly reach full integration in another painting.

"Le Déjeuner": Borrowed Elements

Le Déjeuner was not attacked for minor shortcomings like these but for its major virtues as a technical innovation, and for the "immorality" of its subject. Defending him against this latter charge, Manet's supporters pointed out that he was following the tradition of an old master, the Venetian painter Giorgione, who about 1500 had also combined nude female and clothed male figures in a landscape, and that the picture, hanging in the Louvre, shocked no one. This superficial parallel is still regarded as a defense that should have routed the opposition, but actually it is not much to the point. Giorgione's *Concert Champêtre* [182] is a harmony of sensuous textures—flesh, velvet, satin, hair, grass, crys-



184. MANET: *The Balcony*, 1869. 67¾ x 49¼". Louvre, Paris.

185. GOYA: *Majas on a Balcony, c.* 1810–1815. 76⅝ x 49½". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

tal, stone, and foliage. It evokes a world of idyllic dream; neither the luxuriously costumed adolescent males nor the golden-fleshed females can be compared in spirit with Manet's young boulevardiers or the well-known model who posed for the nude. This rebuttal was made at the time and is perfectly legitimate. *Le Déjeuner's* defenders further pointed out that Manet's group of three figures was taken from a trio of river gods appearing in the lower right corner of a composition by Raphael, a *Judgment of Paris* [183]. But this also is a poor defense. Raphael's figures are allegorical nudes. It is true that the Academy had honored other paintings on the basis of even more tenuous connections with its Renaissance deity, but that is still no defense of *Le Déjeuner*, if it needs defense.

But of course it does not need defense of this kind. Manet was not trying to emulate either Giorgione or Raphael. He frequently borrowed compositions. This was not plagiarism any more than it was plagiarism when Ingres borrowed the pose of the *Bather of Valpinçon* from some Roman sculptor or the composition of *Stratonice* from a Greek vase painting. Manet's borrowings are closer to home—he was especially indebted to Goya—but in the end his borrowing was more superficial than, say, David's when he so meticulously incorporated classical details in his paintings. Manet neither made references to his sources nor made any attempt to conceal them. The superficial debt of *The Balcony*

[184] to Goya's *Majas on a Balcony* [185] could hardly be more apparent, but neither could the fundamental difference between the two paintings. In the Goya, two of his typical spirited young vixens are combined with sinister caped and hatted male figures in the background, ominous, half-revealed, the omnipresence of evil behind the bright façade of daily life as Goya shows it again and again. In Manet's adaptation these figures are replaced by a solid, respectable bourgeois as one of a triple portrait group. And when Manet planned a picture of the execution of Maximilian it was simpler to refer to Goya's *Executions of the 3d of May* than to do research and try to reproduce the actual scene of Maximilian's death, which was quite different from Manet's representation of it. He borrowed also from Velásquez, especially in full-length standing figures.

Must all this borrowing be apologized for? After all, most painters who borrow so directly from others are damned as eclectic or with that even more damning word *derivative*. There are all varieties of eclecticism, but at his typical worst the eclectic painter borrows from other men in the hope that something of their meaning will come along with the borrowed forms. Manet is in no way an eclectic painter, and no pardon is necessary because no offense is committed. He is no more an eclectic painter than Shakespeare was an inferior dramatist when he made use of borrowed plots.

Manet's borrowing, however, has nothing to do with new interpretation or enlargement of the subject. He is, in fact, not much interested in subject; a subject merely supplies him with forms to be painted. In *Le Déjeuner* he is not interested in the fact that some young people are having a picnic in unconventional circumstances. He is interested in a way of doing the picture, the means of representation rather than what is represented. *Le Déjeuner's* relationship to Giorgione's *Concert* or Raphael's *Judgment of Paris* need not be apologized for nor need it be used as a defense. *Le Déjeuner* need only be regarded as an effort to discover technical means to make the most direct translation of pure visual experience into the language of paint.

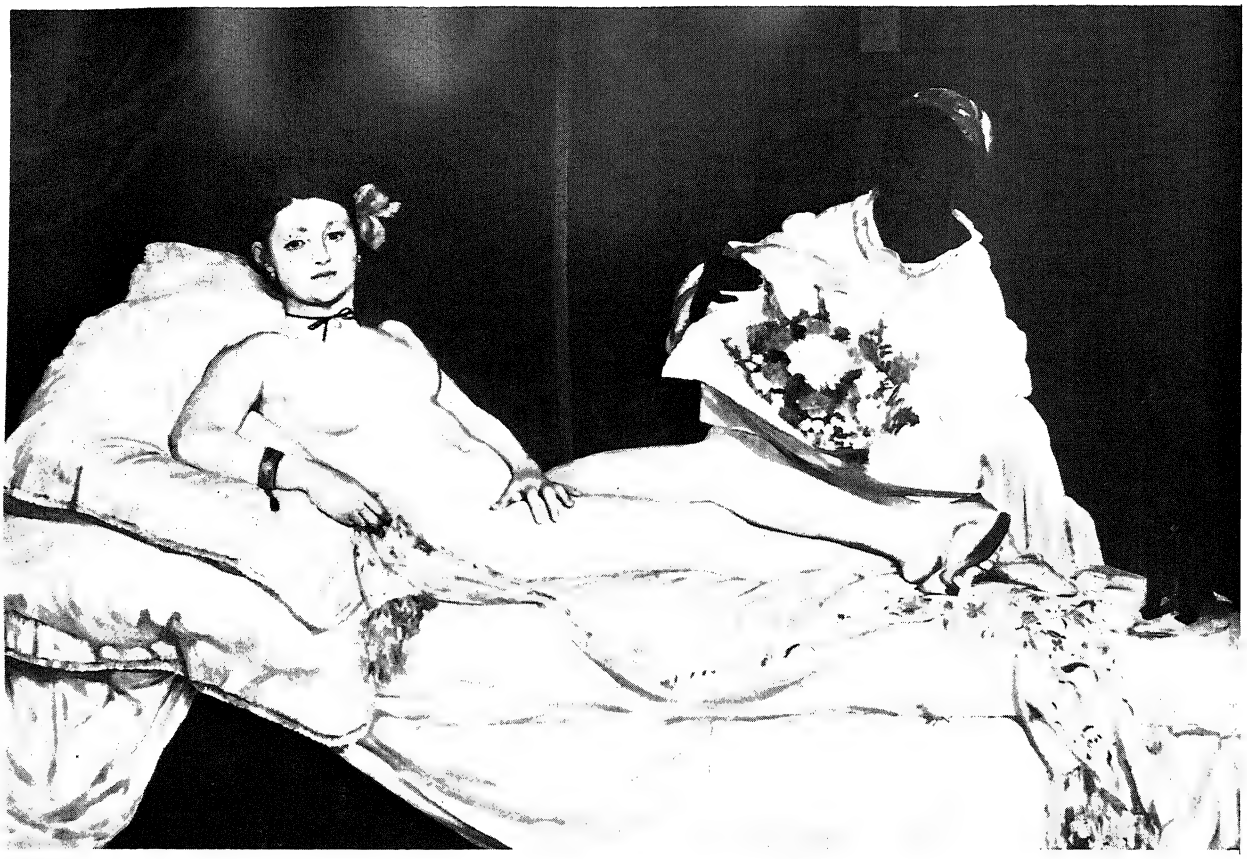
"Olympia"

If there is any question as to whether *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* is entirely successful, or only a near-masterpiece occupying the position of a landmark, there is no question at all in the case of a picture Manet was painting the year of the *Salon des Refusés* but did not exhibit until two years later, his indisputable masterpiece, *Olympia* [186].

Le Déjeuner is startling; *Olympia* is breathtaking. *Le Déjeuner* is puzzling, here and there contradictory; *Olympia* is of the utmost clarity, brilliantly consistent in each detail, each brush stroke, each color. A young courtesan, unabashed in her nakedness, regards us with the same clinical detachment with which Manet has observed and represented her. The hard little body, the short legs, the sturdy trunk, the broad face are those of a woman of the people, but Manet makes no comment, either sentimental or sociological. He does not dramatize. The drama is in the paint—in the abrupt collision of the flat, pinkish-cream light areas of the flesh with the equally flat grayish or blackish shadows; in the expanse of white sheet where nothing seems to happen yet where the painted surface is alive; in the quick, summary notations of embroidered ornaments, of the ribbon at the neck, the bracelet; in the explosion of the bouquet of flowers.

Like *Le Déjeuner*, *Olympia* has a traditional counterpart in Venetian painting (and a closer one than Giorgione's *Concert Champêtre*), Titian's portrait of a Venetian courtesan, called *The Venus of Urbino* [187]. The parallels are direct: the general disposition of the nude figure on the white-sheeted couch, the screen or curtain in the background to the left, the two serving women in the depth to the right in the Titian and the single serving woman in the corresponding foreground position in the Manet, the little white dog in the Titian, the black cat in the Manet. But, again, the transformation is complete, from the sensuous harmonies of the Venetian painting to the flat objectivity of the Manet.

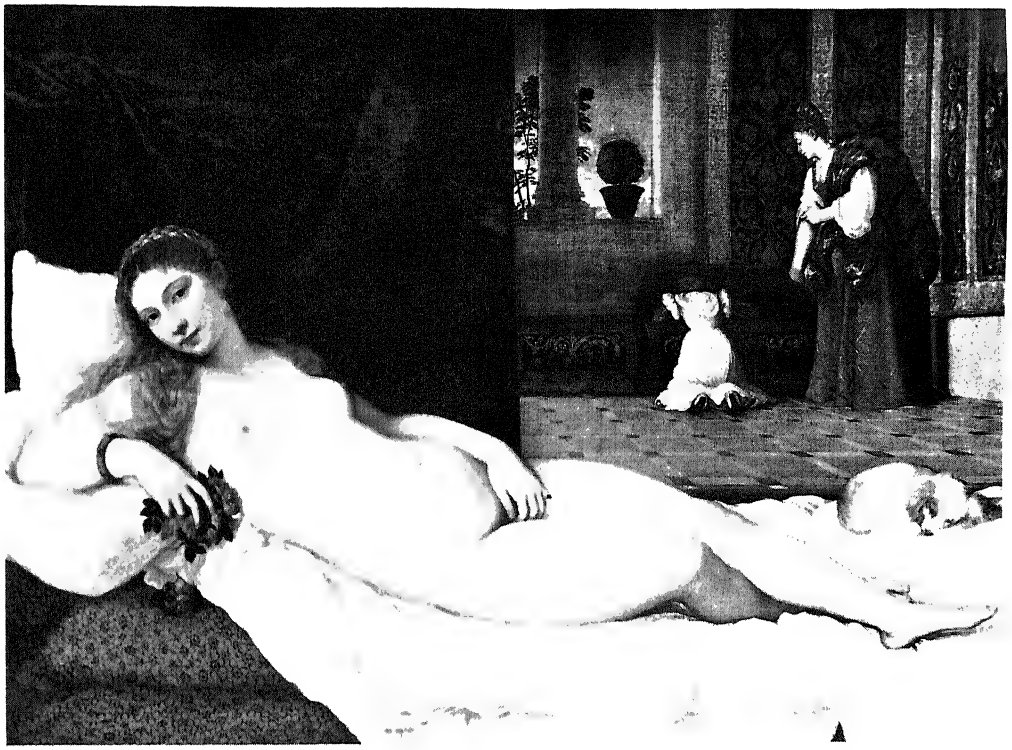
Olympia is entirely a studio product, with none of *Le Déjeuner*'s disturbing am-



186. MANET: *Olympia,* 1863, Salon of 1865. 51¼ x 74¾". Louvre, Paris.

biguity in the grafting of studio figures onto a landscape, and, above all, without the inconsistent foreground–background relationships. Manet's flash-of-light vision is better adapted to the revelation of objects at close range than to the exploration of deep space. The closing up of the space occupied by the serving women in the Titian—by pulling the single serving woman of Olympia into the same plane with the rest of the subject—makes possible the unity of this vision. Manet has finally achieved the objectivity implied in Courbet's defenses of realism.

It should be obvious by now that if the term *classicism* is elastic, and *romanticism* more so, the term *realism* is most elastic of all, including the widest range of responses in the transcription of the visible world. Some critics, especially in France, differentiate objective realism like Manet's with the term *naturalism,* leaving the term *realism* free to designate realistic painting which presents ideas, especially those having to do with social theories, as Courbet thought his did. Courbet's friend Castagnary, who helped him formulate some of his pronouncements, also wrote that "Courbet and Proudhon have committed an aesthetic error. Art has nothing to do with the imposition of ideas," and he was using the term *naturalism* as early as the year of the *Salon des Refusés.* Moral values are incorporated into realism; naturalism is amoral. The realist interprets what he sees; the naturalist merely paints the spectacle of life around him, its vice and ugliness, its beauty and sweetness, not preferring one to the other and commenting on neither. The realist may try to find fundamental truths in commonplace objects, but the naturalist deals with the moment only, even at its most ephemeral.



187. TITIAN: *Venus of Urbino*, 1538. 25⅝ x 46⅞". Uffizi, Florence.

The aesthetic satisfactions to be found in naturalism, then, must not be looked for in the subject. Being uninterpreted, the subject is only second best to actuality, and, furthermore, the naturalistic painter may choose to represent subjects aesthetically unpleasing in themselves. Aesthetic satisfaction must be found only in the way the picture is done, since it cannot be found elsewhere. The idea of "art for art's sake" is born, an idea leading eventually to the argument that, since subject is not important, it must be eliminated altogether and a painting must be nothing but lines, shapes, and colors. This is one of the arguments of contemporary abstract painters. Since it can be traced back directly to Manet's "art for art's sake," it makes Manet the first modern artist in a quite specific way. And it gives additional importance to the year 1863 as a dividing line.

Yet, at the risk of confusing the point and at the same time committing a heresy, we must admit that *Olympia* as a subject has an interest aside from the major one of art for art's sake. Granted that Manet does not interpret or moralize or tell a story or make a comment of any kind; granted that his own interest in the subject was incidental to his interest in painting it a certain way; granted that the fascination of this way is in itself enough to hold one in front of the picture—granted all this, it is still true that *Olympia* is not only a representation of reality but a revelation of it. Actuality is not transcribed so much as vivified, intensified, through Manet's vision of it. For close to a century now the young courtesan has regarded us with her special combination of assurance, insolence, and indifference. She still does so as if her glance and ours had just met; she holds us eternally upon the point, upon the moment, of recognition. With *Olympia* we finally reach the pole opposite classicism: the classicist sought to create images in which eternal and universal values are summarized; Manet creates images in which the moment, with whatever implications it may hold for the individual, is crystallized.

Manet before "Le Déjeuner"

How did Manet arrive at *Le Déjeuner* and *Olympia*?

He had entered Couture's studio in 1850 at the age of eighteen, after a time spent at sea and two failures to pass entrance examinations for the naval school. Before this his parents, both of them from wealthy families, had accepted the boy's choice of a naval career as an alternative to law, which was their own ambition for him.

The influence of Couture on Manet should not be discounted. Couture was a harsh and narrow man, but he was no mean painter as far as brush and color are concerned. *The Romans of the Decadence* is a tiresome exercise and its faults are easy to enumerate mercilessly, but in many small canvases—*Little Giles* [188], for instance—where he is just painting, Couture is almost as pure a painter as Manet. The color in *Little Giles* is rich, subdued, and creamy; the broad tonalities of light and darks even suggest an origin for Manet's representational processes as already described. Couture was an excellent teacher for Manet, who was able to take advantage of the good that was offered while remaining immune to the trumpery and bombast of the master's "important" work.

Manet was a realist from the start, and his student days under Couture—1850 to 1855 or 1856—coincided with the emergence of Courbet, but Manet never studied under anyone but Couture in spite of quarrels and insults in Couture's studio. Manet objected to the artificiality of the studio poses, the tight rendering that was mandatory in student work, all the academic rules and conventions. He drew and painted with such freedom that Couture told him once, "You will never be more than the Daumier of your time," which was his way of saying that Manet might pass at the level of this popular cartoonist who had a certain vulgar flair but was, of course, no artist. What Couture thought of Courbet and his followers he summed up in a painting called *The Realist*, showing a painter in rough country clothes using a monumental classical head as a stool to sit on while sketching a butchered pig.

188. COUTURE: *Little Giles*, date unknown. 25¾ x 21½". Philadelphia Museum of Art, William L. Elkins Collection.

Manet's special friend in Couture's studio was Antonin Proust, who entered it at the same time. Proust was another youth of intelligence and social position, equally eager for conventional success. Both young men admired Delacroix, who had become a legendary hero to student painters. They called on him at one time when Manet wanted to make a copy of his *Dante and Vergil in Hell*, which was then hanging in the Luxembourg Museum. Delacroix received the two young men and granted permission to copy, but his manner was so chilly and formal beneath its elegant courtesy that Manet did not follow up an association that would have been much more to his taste than the low-caste assemblies around Courbet at *Brasserie des Martyrs*.

Delacroix might have remembered the visit when he spoke up for the first picture Manet sent to the Salon jury, *The Absinthe*

189. MANET: *Lola de Valence,* 1862. 48½ x 36¼". Louvre, Paris.

190. MANET: *Woman with a Parrot,* 1866. 72⅞ x 50⅝". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Erwin Davis.

Drinker, in 1859, of which Couture had said that the only absinthe drinker must have been the man who painted it. The jury agreed with Couture and rejected it over the head of Delacroix.

But two years later Manet made his surprising Salon success with the portrait of his parents and especially the *Spanish Guitar Player*. His interest in Spanish subjects was increased by a group of Spanish dancers who were making a great success in Paris. He painted most of them individually and also in groups on the stage. When he was not painting them he painted models and friends in Spanish costume; *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* was posed by his brother.

The Spanish pictures were among those the critics found most offensive of the fourteen Manet exhibited with such a disastrous reception at Martinet's just before the 1863 Salon. A portrait of the leading dancer, *Lola de Valence* [189], was especially detested; it was described as a "bizarre confusion of red, blue, yellow, and black." One critic said it was as if Goya had "gone native in the middle of the Mexican pampas, smearing his canvases with crushed cochineal bugs"—these insects being the source of a brilliant magenta dye. Manet was much influenced just at this time by the colors of Spanish painting; he adopted the typical Spanish neutral gray or blackish backgrounds with spots of color played against them. The color is fairly bright when it is accented in this way, but it is hard to see a "bizarre confusion" today in *Lola de Valence,* even though Manet retouched the

picture, brightening its color, after the exhibition. There are vivid passages, but only the soupy browns and obvious tints of the standard Salon product could have made them seem so outrageously raw. Many painters even imitated the darkened tones of paintings by the old masters, disfigured by coats of dirt and varnish. Today Manet's color has suffered from similar disfigurement. Recently the Metropolitan Museum of Art cleaned its group of Manets with surprising results. The *Woman with a Parrot* [190] was transformed from a pleasant, rather quiet picture into a brilliant one; the long robe, which for years had appeared to be a somewhat innocuous light tan, was revealed as a fresh luminous pink with almost white lights, combined with the woman's russet hair in which the ribbon is a bright blue accent. Such a revelation makes early criticisms of Manet more understandable, since the contrast between his color and that of the usual picture of the time was greater than it appears to have been by the evidence of Manet's uncleaned canvases today.

The Scandal of "Olympia"

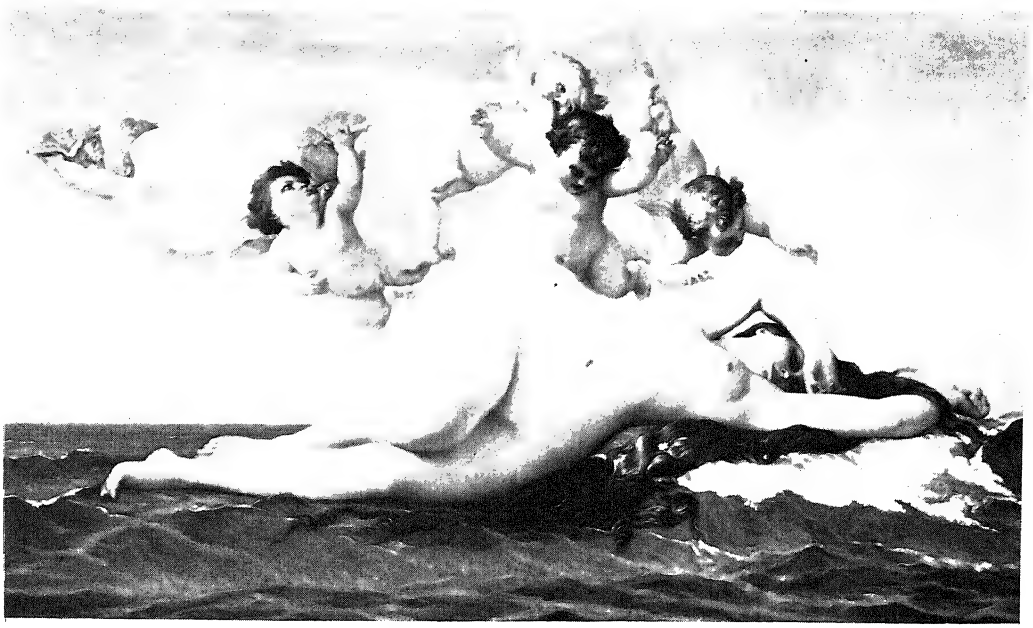
With the exhibition of *Lola de Valence* and the other pictures at Martinet's and their bad critical reception, the damage was done, and when Manet submitted *Le Déjeuner* to the Salon of 1863, the events as already described occurred. After the scandal of the *Salon des Refusés* the Emperor continued his half-hearted efforts to liberalize academic practices. If he did not put his heart into it, it was because as a good bourgeois himself Napoleon III actually approved of the Academy and liked its typical product.

During the Salon's long history its juries had been elected in various ways. For a while after the Revolution of 1848, election was by the votes of all painters who had exhibited the previous year, a fairly satisfactory system although it carried with it the risk of inbreeding. But before long this system was tightened, and the jury was nominated in part by previous medal winners and in part by the Academy itself. Considering that the majority of the medal winners were academicians, it is easy to see how this system produced the situation of 1863. Jury membership had again become static and the academic caucus seemed again impregnable.

Now the Emperor made a tepid reform by which the Academy's direct nominations were reduced to one quarter of the jury members, the remaining three quarters to be elected by vote of painters—but again only painters who were also medal winners. But it was a reform of sorts, and combined with a new caution instilled by the narrow escapes of 1863, it produced a liberal jury that included Corot. In 1864 there was a petition to continue the *Salon des Refusés.* It was not granted but a room was set aside for the exhibition of some rejected pictures. They attracted little attention because more pictures had been admitted to the Salon, including Manet's. He exhibited a *Christ with Angels* and a *Bull Fight.* The criticism of the latter was so violent that he destroyed it, except for a fragment.

Then in 1865 came the exhibition of *Olympia,* with a *Christ Insulted by the Soldiers* in the same Salon. It would be repetitious to go into much detail of the vituperative attacks to which they were subjected. The critics surpassed their record of 1863 in viciousness but not often in originality. The same objections were made to Manet's "coarseness" and to the "immorality" of the *Olympia.* It was compared, among other things, to "high" game, and the crowds surrounding it to morbid sensation hunters looking at corpses in the morgue. Every indecency and corruption was read into it, nor was Manet himself spared inferences that his private character was of much the same order. Yet from the 1863 Salon the Emperor had purchased a *Birth of Venus* [191] by the academician Cabanel, as audaciously erotic a nude as has ever been put on public exhibition. The critics admitted that this studio Venus was "wanton" but were able to discover refinements in Cabanel's painting to counteract its lasciviousness. These were the same critics who called *Olympia* a dirty picture.

To escape the furore Manet went to Spain. It was his first trip to that country



191. CABANEL: *Birth of Venus,* 1863. 31½ x 53". Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, Gibson Bequest.

whose art had so influenced him. He was disappointed, not in the paintings of Velásquez and Goya, which he now saw at their best, but in the life and the aspect of the cities and people. He had expected something more picturesque, more colorful, more like the painting and the dancing that up to then had been his Spanish experience. We have the anomaly of a trip to Spain ending his Spanish period, because after that Manet turned more and more to the life around him in Paris for the subject matter of his paintings.

Manet and Zola

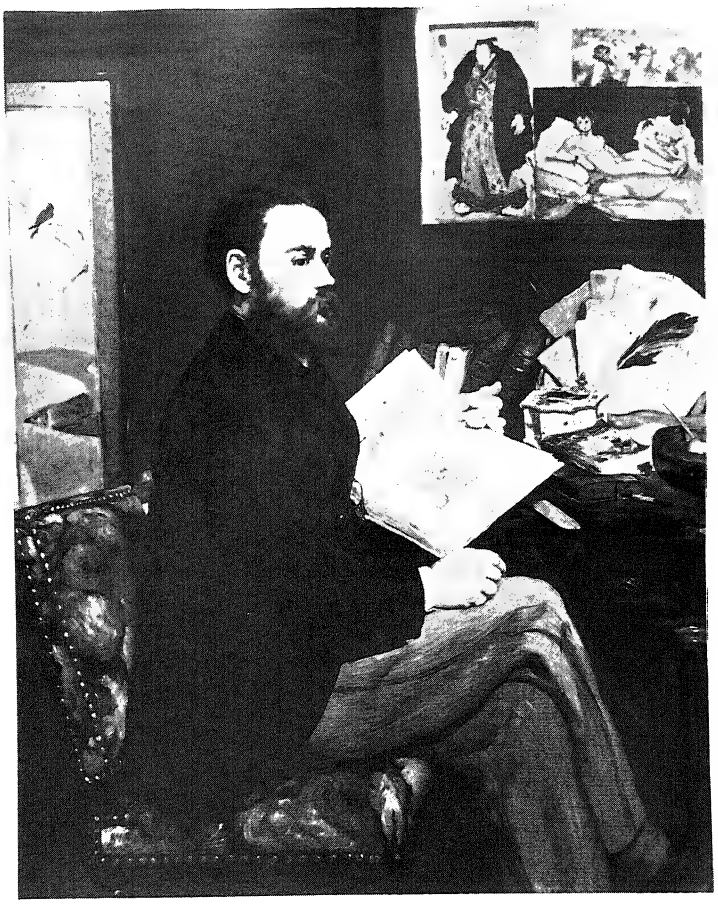
Upon his return from Spain, at the border, Manet received an indication of what he might continue to expect at home. The French customs inspector, seeing the name Manet on the luggage, called his family in to take a look at the eccentric artist who had painted the scandalous pictures everyone was talking about. Manet suffered intensely from this kind of notoriety, which was to continue with only temporary abatements for the rest of his life, and he never developed a defense against it. The Spanish trip was in 1865; in 1866 the Salon refused *The Fifer,* now in the Louvre. The next year there was another of the great world fairs. Not invited to exhibit, Manet erected his own pavilion (as Courbet had done for the exposition of 1855 and as he did also this year). More scandals, more jeers. *The Execution of Maximilian,* painted for this exhibition, was withdrawn at the last minute because of the touchy political situation. The next year, 1868, Manet was finally accepted again by the Salon with two pictures, both very badly hung, *Woman with a Parrot* and a portrait of *Émile Zola* [192].

Émile Zola, of course, was to emerge as one of the dominant figures of his generation with a great block of sociological novels, a dozen crusades, and the climax of the Dreyfus case where his exposures shook the foundation of the French government. The Dreyfus case is an abomination in the history of injustice, countered only by the fact that the same nation produced a Zola to correct it. In Manet's portrait Zola is only twenty-eight years old. He was just emerging from obscurity and had not long emerged from poverty.

In his capacity as a critic of the arts, which is the one that concerns us here, Zola's perception did not equal his courage. He defended Manet and some of the other painters we will see, but without a clear understanding of what they were about aesthetically. Nevertheless he defended them with the conviction that they were achieving something good and were having to achieve it while suffering injustices from established hacks and pedants. The year Manet's *Fifer* was rejected, Zola wrote a series of articles on the organization of the Salon system for a paper called *L'Evénement*, including an article in defense of Manet. "A place in the Louvre is reserved for Manet," he wrote. "It is impossible, impossible I say, that he will not have his day of triumph, that he will not obliterate the timid mediocrities surrounding him." Furious objections poured into the offices of *L'Evénement* (not from everybody—some readers thought Zola was joking), and Zola, who had asked special permission to write the series of articles, lost his post as art critic of the journal. The following year he published a monograph on Manet and Manet did his portrait.

Zola is shown seated at his desk surrounded by references to the new movement in painting. A photograph of *Olympia* is on the wall. Behind it, and half covered by it, is Velásquez's *Bacchus*. The third picture in the group is a Japanese print. On the table, just behind the quill pen, the monograph on Manet does double duty as a reference to the connection between the painter and writer and as Manet's signature on the portrait.

The Japanese print is a rather special reference. These prints, today so familiar, were just becoming generally known among artists in Europe, some of the first ones having been discovered among other packing in barrels of imported porcelains. In Japan the print was a vigorous popular art form not taken very seriously by the effete aestheticians and decadent painters when prints first flourished there. After developing in a tightly closed civilization, the prints when they finally reached Europe much later bore some surprising resemblances to the painting that was beginning



192. MANET: *Émile Zola*, 1868. 57½ x 43¼". Louvre, Paris.

to develop with Manet and the impressionists. The subjects were taken from the daily world of entertainment, the theater, the transient world of actors and courtesans, teahouses, views famous with tourists, landmarks. These subjects were in opposition to the formalized art of the "fine" painters but at the same time they were not presented in an unimaginatively realistic way; they were extremely stylized and sophisticated. Manet was doing much the same thing. He painted dancers, singers, people in a public garden listening to music, the courtesan Olympia. But these subjects from the transient world were not approached emotionally, any more than were the subjects of the Japanese prints. Technically the Western painter and the Japanese printmaker were very different, the Japanese print being conceived in conventionalized

193. Torii Kiyonaga: *Shigeyuki Executing Calligraphy*, 1783. Color woodcut, 14¾ x 9⅝". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller.

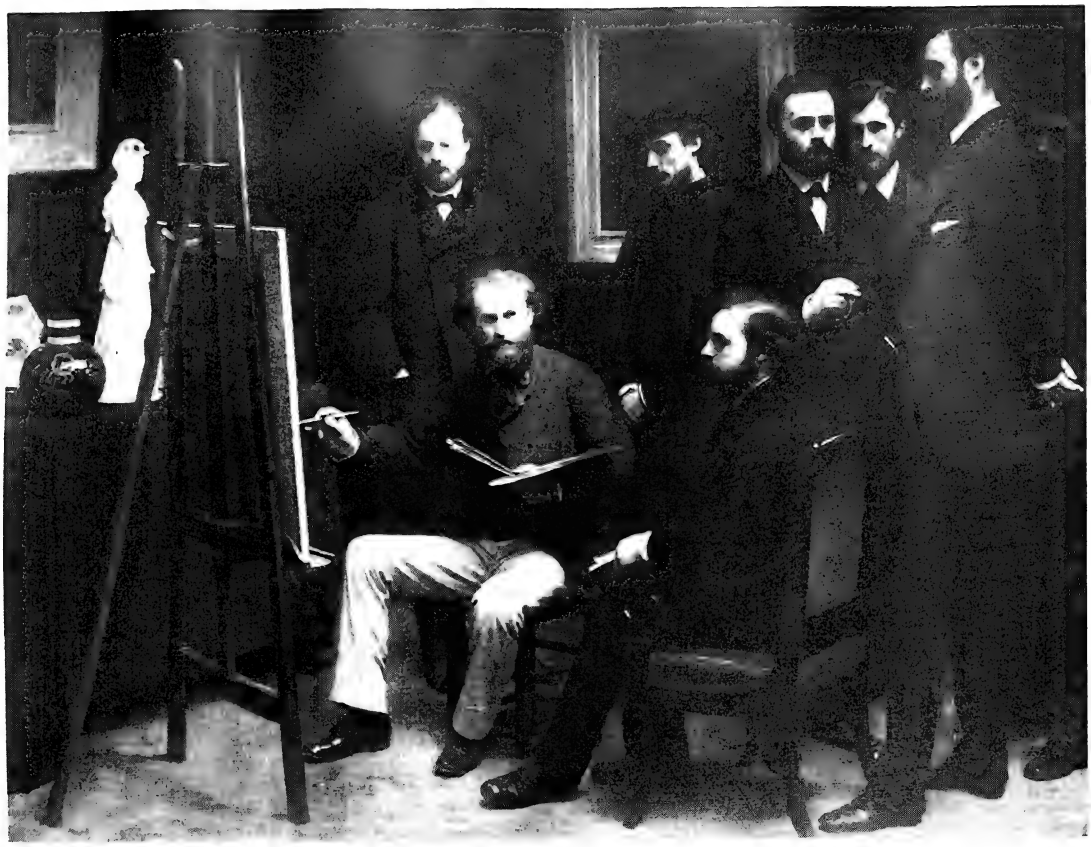
linear patterns having little to do with the look of actuality and *Olympia*, for example, having everything to do with one vision of it. Yet when the critic Castagnary called *Olympia* "a playing card," he referred to its composition of flat, well-defined areas of color and he could as appropriately have compared it to a Japanese print for the same reason. European artists now began to draw upon the Japanese print for compositional ideas, and in the portrait of Zola the arrangement of the background into nicely balanced rectangular areas—the pictures, the screen, the resultant rectangular areas of wall—is one reflection of Japanese print composition [193].

Manet and His Contemporaries

A group of painters, literary men, and dilettantes now began to gather around Manet, some of them his own age, most of them a little younger. The difference was only a few years—ten or less—but psychologically the younger painters were separated from him by a generation. *Le Déjeuner* and *Olympia* had already made Manet a name and a martyr; the younger men were just beginning their careers, and although they were meeting the same reception as Manet, his conspicuousness made him their spokesman and the symbol of their revolt. He bore the brunt of the attacks on this group of "modern" artists, who were soon to become known as the impressionists. During their formative years the *Café Guerbois* was their center, replacing Courbet's *Brasserie des Martyrs* as the winnowing place for new ideas.

Manet did not pontificate as Courbet had tended to do, nor did he ever identify himself wholeheartedly with the group around him. His cultivated manners gave an impression of greater warmth and participation than he was offering; even more than Delacroix, he barricaded himself from intimate contacts with all but a few people. The only members of the new group who knew him well were the ones whose personal backgrounds offered the same amenities as his own. The only bond that held him to the bohemian world of the struggling impressionists at the *Café Guerbois* was one of which he would gladly have rid himself: his rejection and vilification by the world he had failed to conquer. During all this time, up into the 1870's, he had sold fewer than half a dozen pictures. Sales were not vitally important to him except as a form of recognition, although even his substantial means, which he inherited, were beginning to feel some strain. He was married (after a liaison of some years, to his piano teacher) and lived quietly.

One of the more sedate members on the fringe of the impressionist group was Henri Fantin-Latour (1836–1904), a painter acceptable to the Salon and its public but sympathetic to the innovators. One of his recent successes had been a group

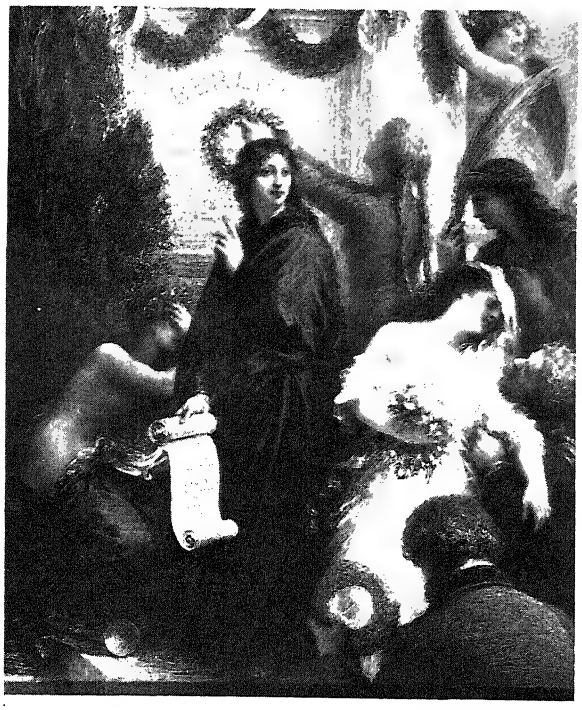


194. FANTIN-LATOUR: *A Studio in the Batignolles Quarter*, 1870. 68½ x 82". Louvre, Paris.

195. FANTIN-LATOUR: *Still-Life*, 1866. 23¾ x 28¾". National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C., Chester Dale Collection.

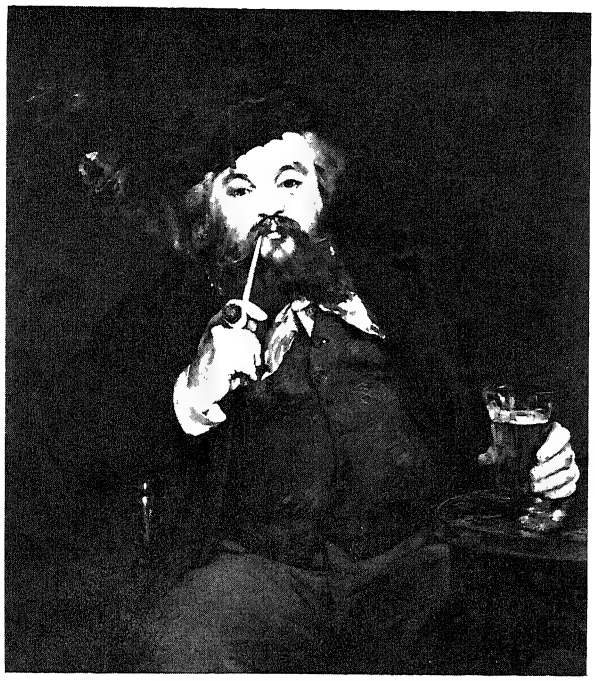
portrait of Delacroix surrounded by friends, called *Hommage à Delacroix*. He now decided to repeat this documentary idea in a portrait of Manet in his studio, thus loyally identifying himself with the rebels in paying homage to their leader—although he left the "homage" out of the title, calling the picture *A Studio in the Batignolles Quarter* [194], where Manet then had his work place.

Manet is at his easel. Seated next to him is Astruc, the painter and writer who had been one of his most vigorous supporters during the *Salon des Refusés* and had maintained an association with the impressionists. Zola stands at Astruc's side. The young man whose head seems framed by the picture behind him on the wall is the painter Renoir; the tall one at the right is the painter



196. FANTIN-LATOUR: *Homage to Berlioz*, 1885. Pastel, 24½ x 20". Philadelphia Museum of Art, Anonymous Loan.

197. MANET: *Le Bon Bock*, 1873. 37 x 32⅝". Collection Mrs. Carroll S. Tyson, Chestnut Hill, Pa.



Bazille; behind Bazille, as if crowded in as an afterthought, appears the shadowy face of Claude Monet. These are important men and we will have a great deal to say about them. Standing behind Manet is a German painter of less consequence named Otto Scholderer who worked largely in London but made several stays in Paris and, of course, knew Fantin well. He painted still-life, some landscape, and some charming figures, bridging romanticism and impressionism, but need not be considered further. The eighth portrait is of Edmond Maître, an amateur musician and a great and loyal friend of the group*

Late Pictures and Last Days

Suddenly one of Manet's pictures made a Salon success. He had become interested in the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Franz Hals, whose free brushwork resembled Manet's own. Hals's subjects included genre ones of a convivial nature; Manet now painted a fat man enjoying a pipe and a glass of beer, *Le Bon Bock* [197], and the public loved it. No objection could be made to the violence of the color this time. It was all grays and browns and normal flesh tones, with one flash of white in the cuff of a sleeve, the most typically Manet detail in the picture. Elsewhere the painting is

* Fantin-Latour is not easy to classify as a painter. Reduced in size and printed in black and white as they are here, his portraits might be photographs. At full scale this quality is tempered by the presence of the brush, with which Fantin had a delicate touch. His still-life painting [195] is only a shade less photographic. The arrangements of the painted objects are decorative like other popular still-life, but more subtly adjusted into balances of form and color. Fantin's success in the Salon and other salesrooms was inevitable since he so completely fulfilled the first requirement: conformist subject matter represented with detailed accuracy. Occasionally he would execute a painting with the dash of Manet or the more broken technique of the impressionists, but in general he adhered to surface respect for conventional academic disciplines. However, he was without academic pretensions, even in the allegorical and literary or musical subjects that are a third group within his work [196]. In these his style can go rather soft and they are not as satisfying as the portraits and still-life.

198. MANET: *Boating*, 1874. 38¼ x 51¼". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

as dextrous as usual but more conventional in tonality. The face is still conceived in well-defined planes individualized by the strokes of the brush, but there are more planes, hence the forms are represented in more detail. Confronted with a subject it had always liked, painted in a more conventional technique, the Salon public was delighted.

Manet's friends were less pleased. The success of *Le Bon Bock* was based on the very values they—and Manet—regarded as false ones. *Le Bon Bock* was a success not because it was a fine painting but because it was a picture of a jolly fat man enjoying a pipe and a beer. But no one need have felt any concern. The next year two of Manet's three submissions were rejected, and the accepted one, *The Railroad Station,* received the usual scandalous press. The story continued in the same way. Manet was refused for another Exposition Universelle in 1878. Two years before his death, his old friend from Couture's studio, Antonin Proust, was appointed Minister of Fine Arts. He forced Manet's election to the Legion of Honor with a medal in the Salon. But Manet was now suffering from locomotor ataxia and was too ill to enjoy this tardy and dubious award. He died in 1883, and when seven years later *Olympia* was purchased by subscription and offered to the Louvre,* it was accepted only reluctantly and under duress, although developments in painting had by then affirmed its indisputable pre-eminence as a landmark in the history of art.

During Manet's lifetime, impressionism was being developed by his fellow painters as an art of the out of doors, full of the shimmer of light in the open air painted in a high-keyed palette of pure tints eliminating the grays and blacks that were such an important factor in Manet's color. Manet

* Strictly speaking, to the Luxembourg Museum, the Louvre's waiting room. A painter must have been dead ten years before his work can hang in the Louvre.

had resisted the appeal of impressionism and outdoor painting, but after 1874 he accepted it more and more. His conversion began when he watched Monet paint at Argenteuil, on the Seine, one of the impressionists' favorite spots. It was the year following the Salon success of *Le Bon Bock,* and it is typical of Manet that in order to follow a new interest he discarded the opportunity to make the kind of success he had always coveted, by repeating the successful formula. His color began to freshen, to lighten, his brush stroke increased in vivacity. But he remained Manet, the man of the boulevards and the studios. Pure landscape did not much appeal to him; when he painted the out of doors he populated it with his city folk, out of town for the day. But it was a great change. The couple enjoying themselves in *Boating* [198], the naturalness and relaxation of their attitudes, the informality of the composition suggesting that the subject has been caught snapshot fashion—all these are a long way from the couples in *Le Déjeuner,* its studied arrangement, the artificiality of its combination of figures and landscape. The couple in *Boating* exist in the full open air permeated by sunlight.

The sparkle and informality that are imposed on the outdoor painter when he

199. MANET: *Skating,* 1877. 36¼ x 28¾". Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass., Maurice Wertheim Collection.

200. MANET: Detail from Figure 199.

wants to capture effects of light and air began to show also in Manet's studio subjects. *Skating* [199], if it had been painted a few years earlier, would have been flatter, more static, its lights broader, its darks more concentrated and emphatic, its whole surface more tightly knit. Instead, it vibrates everywhere with nervous, energetic, restless, life, modeled as it is in hundreds of quick suggestive strokes which are at least as important as strokes of color as they are as definitions of form [200]. Color becomes brighter and purer, the suggestion of form even more cursory, although it remains decisive. An eye may now be nothing but an irregular star of paint; a lip or a nose or an ear may be made up of a brush of color spotted with an accent of light, another of dark. It is the kind of painting that can degenerate into the shallowest kind of tour de force. In Manet it never does. The portrait of *George Moore* [201] pushes technical showmanship just to the edge of artificiality, simultaneously transcribing the features of this talented but rather irritating young man* as a work-of-art-for-art's-sake and as a witty revelation of an exceptional character. The two aspects of the picture are inseparably present in one another.

Manet's last major work, and very nearly his last one of any kind, was *The Bar at the Folies Bergères* [202], painted in 1881 (although dated 1882) when his illness had progressed so far that it was only with the greatest physical difficulty that he could paint at all. Yet this is a large picture and it approaches *Olympia* in its certainty, in the drama of its paint, in its arresting presence. And by a perfectly logical tour de force it manages to hark back to the early style of *Olympia* in certain passages, while pushing to its limit in other passages the evanescent, shimmering, impressionist manner of Manet's last years.

The immediate foreground is the counter of a bar, with bottles, a compote of fruit,

201. MANET: *George Moore*, 1879. Pastel, 21¾ x 13⅞". Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, H. O. Havemeyer Collection.

and a glass vase holding two roses, all painted as if Manet wanted to demonstrate finally that no one could excel him as a painter of still life. The barmaid stands behind the counter, leaning forward slightly toward an invisible customer. The silhouette is bold, of an extraordinary symmetry relieved by small interruptions and variations, climaxed in the geometrical oval of the head with its heavy cap of hair. The

* The young Irishman and professional show-off had come to Paris to study under Cabanel but soon abandoned the idea of a career as a painter. As an extremely superficial art critic and a deft novelist he drew upon French models for a career as an English man of letters.

202. MANET: *The Bar at the Folies Bergères*, 1881. 37¾ x 50". Collection Courtauld, London.

face, which is not Olympia's in features, recalls Olympia's as a passage of flat tone suddenly formed and rounded by the brushing in of a few small, sudden concentrations of dark.

The rest of the picture—the entire background—is a mirror. The solid, vigorously defined figure of the barmaid, as reflected from the back, is now amorphous, softened; the unseen customer is seen facing her, a few half-tone blurs; farther back the dress circle is half defined, half suggested, in merging and intermingling shapes that coalesce here and there into a gesture, an attitude, a hat, a gloved hand holding opera glasses.

Yet, if *The Bar at the Folies Bergères* summarizes so much of Manet's accomplishment, it is also inventive in a new way. The complexity of its composition, the structural geometry of the insistent verticals running in bands across the picture, the strong central triangle of the figure with the secondary geometrical forms included within it—all these are new in Manet. *The Bar at the Folies Bergères* is a swan song only by its coincidental date with Manet's last illness and his death. He was painting with as much inventiveness and curiosity and independence as he ever had done. And no man has ever painted with more.

Immediately after Manet's death his pictures began to sell at rising prices. The press discovered that he was a great painter. Before a year had gone by a memorial show was prepared. It was held in the galleries of the *École des Beaux Arts*—the fortress of the Academy.

CHAPTER 7

Impressionism

The Impressionist Group

In 1874 a group of artists with their core at the *Café Guerbois* organized a society to exhibit their work at their own expense. Such an idea had been in the air for some time, without any unanimity of opinion, but now these men saw no other way to bring their work properly before the public.

Some of the prospective exhibitors wanted to invite the friendlier older painters to show with them, for the prestige this would lend the unknowns—such men as Corot and the grand old revolutionary Courbet, who was still alive although in exile. (It was just as well that they decided against doing so, for even Corot, that man of good will, referred to them later as "that gang.") Other members wanted everyone in the group to pledge never to send to the Salon; still others, who were beginning to have an occasional picture accepted there, thought this idea bad. Manet, their great man, refused to have any part of the exhibition. So did Fantin-Latour. Even some of the painters who decided to come in did so reluctantly, still convinced that the Salon was the real field of conquest.

When the first exhibition was finally organized, it was partly a commercial venture and partly a declaration of aesthetic war. Commercially the members hoped to increase the number of private collectors who were beginning to buy their work. They were spurred on by the fact that just at this time the adventurous dealer Durand-Ruel, who had taken on some of them, was going through a financial crisis and was forced to stop all purchases until he could get his affairs in order. Aesthetically, the group was dedicated to the idea that threadbare

formulas—or arbitrary formulas of any kind—could not be forced onto a painter without stifling him creatively. They demanded the right to paint as they pleased, and what they pleased, as the only means of fulfilling their creative potentials.

After considerable confusion, including quarrels and hurt feelings, an exhibition was assembled and hung in the studio of the photographer Nadar, another habitué of the *Café Guerbois*. Nadar has his own importance in the history of photography, and a cartoon by Daumier shows him in a balloon "elevating photography to the level of a fine art"; he was a pioneer in aerial views.

The thirty exhibitors were an odd combination including half a dozen names that were to be among the greatest of the century, an equal number of sound masters of the second rank, a friendly amateur or two, one popular Salon painter, and a few ghosts who would have disappeared altogether if their names had not been preserved on this historic list.* For so mixed a group no single title seemed descriptive enough, so a noncommittal name was settled on after great effort to find something more specific: *Societé anonyme des artistes peintres, sculpteurs, graveurs, etc.*

But the name did not last; an appropriate descriptive one invented itself. The exhibition of 165 pictures had hardly opened before the painters were dubbed "impressionists," a name considered as hilarious as the painting that supplied the cue for it—*Impression-Sunrise* by Claude Monet. Although the nickname was derisive, it cut through the obscuring surfaces of personal styles to the unifying element in the most original of the pictures. The impressionists accepted the new label and soon changed the name of their organization to *Peintres Impressionistes.*

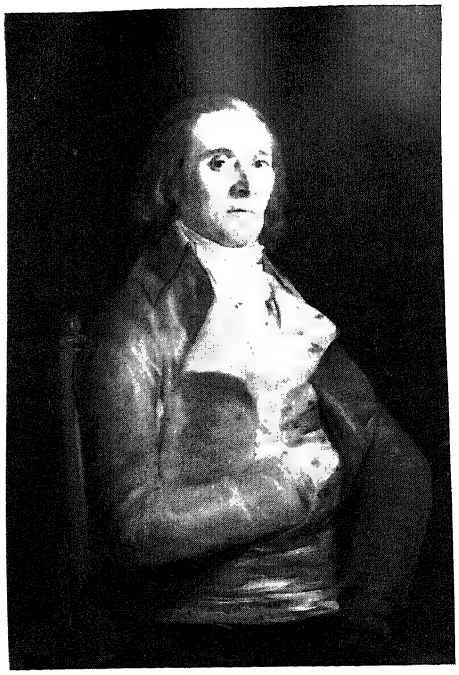
Altogether the impressionists gave eight exhibitions before they disbanded, the first in 1874 and the last in 1886, with many changes of membership during those years. By 1886 the group was full of dissensions and many of the members had grown dissatisfied with impressionism and had departed from it.

By that time, in any case, the organization had served its purpose. It had won its battle for the attention of dealers and collectors in spite of the continued insults of the Academy and its entourage of philistines and mossbacks. Resistance died hard in these circles. As late as 1893, when a great collection of impressionist painting was willed to the Louvre, it was subjected to the kind of criticism accorded *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* thirty years before in the *Salon des Refusés* and was accepted only in part.* Gérôme, now seventy, described the pictures as "filth" that only "a great moral slackening" could make acceptable to the government. But this was

* For the record, in alphabetical order, they were: Astruc, Attendu, Béliard, Boudin, Bracquemond, Brandon, Bureau, Cals, Cézanne, Colin, Degas, Desbras, Guillaumin, Latouche, Lepic, Lépine, Levert, Meyer, de Molins, Monet, Morisot, Mulot-Durivage, de Nittis, A. Ottin, L. A. Ottin, Pissarro, Renoir, Robert, Rouart, and Sisley.

* This was the Caillebotte collection. Gustave Caillebotte was a naval architect of considerable wealth, a quiet man who discovered the impressionists before they became popular on the market and bought their pictures not as investments but because he liked them. (Many canny Americans bought impressionists early because Durand-Ruel, having been right about the Barbizon painters before their prices went up, might be right again.) Caillebotte was an amateur painter himself, made friends with the impressionists, exhibited in the second group show and four successive ones, threw his fine house on the river open to the young painters, and continued to buy their pictures during their most desperate times. He made a point of buying the kinds of pictures not saleable on the regular market—the very large ones and the ones painted to solve special problems. He did this to help the painters, but as a result he also acquired some of their most important work. The Caillebotte paintings that were finally accepted (the rejected ones included some fine Cézannes) are at the heart of the Louvre's impressionist collection.

Another friend of the impressionists was Victor Chocquet, a minor government official, the rarest and most perspicacious type of art collector. With very little money to spare, he was ready to make sacrifices elsewhere to own and enjoy the pictures he liked. As a very young man he bought watercolors by Delacroix. Like Caillebotte he discovered the impressionists for himself. Among the pictures sold by Chocquet's widow in 1899 were thirty-one Cézannes, eleven Renoirs, eleven Monets, and five Manets.



203. Goya: *Dr. Peral, c.* 1800–10. Panel, 37⅝ x 25⅝". National Gallery, London.

204. Goya: Detail from Figure 203.

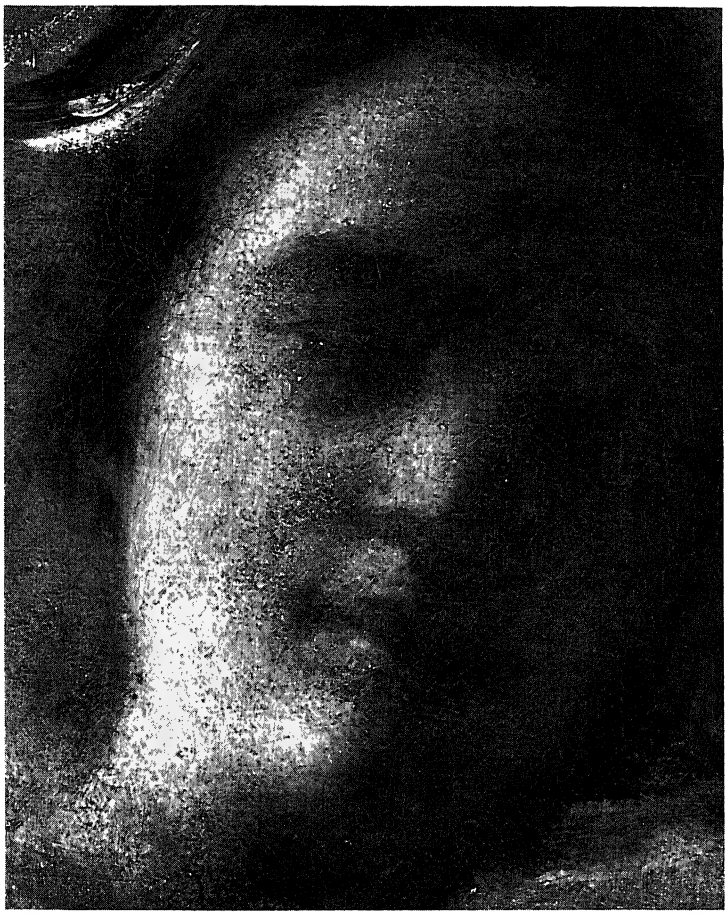
the last senile gasp of the old guard, and although Gérôme and Bouguereau were still coveted by one kind of collector, so were Renoir and Degas by others. Americans were buying so extensively that when *Olympia* was purchased by subscription and offered to the Louvre in 1890, one of the reasons was that the subscribers feared France would lose it as other masterpieces had already been lost to the United States.

The Nature of Impressionism

Just what is impressionism? The word *impression* had been used in art criticism off and on before Monet attached it to his picture of a sunrise. Its connotations were not flattering. The writer Théophile Gautier expressed regrets that Daubigny was satisfied to give his "impression" of a landscape and "neglect" details, although of course Daubigny was deliberately eliminating details in poeticizing his images. "Impression" suggested incompleteness, a superficial vision of the subject. When the impressionists made an honest word of it and sought a definition, one suggestion was "painting in terms of tone rather than in terms of the object itself." Any definition must be based on this idea, the idea that the impressionist does not analyze form but only receives the light reflected from that form onto the retina of his eye and seeks to reproduce the effect of that light, rather than the form of the object reflecting it. For instance, if a bush in the distance seen in a certain light reaches the eye only as a green blur, the impressionist paints it as a green blur, even if he happens to know the bush so well that he could reproduce its form exactly from memory. Monet, the purest of the impressionists if we accept this definition, once said that he wished he had been born blind and could have gained his sight so that he could paint without knowing what the objects before him were, since this would allow him to see them purely in terms of light. Never having seen a bush he would not know that the green blur in the distance was a bush, and would reproduce it in a matching green blur of

205. VELÁSQUEZ: *Venus and Cupid,* 1651. 48¼ x 69¾". National Gallery, London.

206. VELÁSQUEZ: Detail from Figure 205.



paint without having to forget his detailed acquaintance with it as a form.

This pushes to its ultimate Goya's idea of training his brush not to see more than his eye did. But there is the great difference that Goya wanted to train his brush to reproduce forms—"forms that are lighted and forms that are not, planes that are near and planes that are far, projections, and hollows." In his portrait of *Dr. Peral* [203] form is solidly represented, but a close detail of part of the face [204] shows how he has eliminated the "lines and details" to which he objected in classical painting. The bridge of the nose, for instance, is not defined by a line, although to the classical draughtsman lines represent the divisions between forms. The pupil of the eye is not a circular dark spot but a dark irregular area, which was all Goya allowed his brush to see since his own eye could perceive only that much from the distance at which he was painting. But Goya never goes so far as to sacrifice form to this kind of vision.

Further back, Velásquez in the seventeenth century was something of an impressionist in "painting by the tones." The reflection in the mirror in his *Venus and Cupid* [205, 206] is an extreme example. Velásquez has reproduced only the light reflected from the cloudy mirror as his eye received it from a certain distance. That light happens to carry with it the lights and darks composing the reflected face. All lines, all details, have been eliminated in this process of double reflection from the model's face to the painter's retina. Less dramatically, the other forms in the picture are painted in the same way. A host of other examples could be culled from the past to show that the impressionist idea was not altogether new, even if it had not been set up as a theory and a technique until the nineteenth century, with special departures of its own that made it revolutionary.

The quality of instant vision, the subject revealed in a momentary aspect, takes on more importance in impressionism than it ever had before. *Olympia* is seen as if in a sudden flash of light, but the the model is posed, the composition studied. The pure impressionists will paint as if they had

207. MONET: *Red Boats at Argenteuil*, 1875. 23⅝ x 31⅞". Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass., Maurice Wertheim Bequest.

caught the subject unaware, in a chance gesture. And in painting colored light—light colored because it is reflected from the varicolored objects making up the world—the impressionists will shatter the surface of their canvas into thousands of fragmented tints. Both of these innovations imply loss of form—loss of compositional form and loss of solidity in individual forms. Several members of the impressionist group will discover that this is impressionism's soft spot, and we will see them abandoning typical impressionist procedures in order to remedy it.

But whatever its definition, impressionism as a school of painting is the climactic expression of the nineteenth century. It gathers together the contributions of the conflicting schools of the first half and fuses them into a way of painting from which, in turn, the art of the twentieth century develops, partly as a continuation of impressionism, partly as a reaction against it.

The Impressionist Inheritance

From Delacroix the impressionists inherited discoveries in the theory of color upon which they enlarged. His technique of applying color in individual strokes, which he called *flochetage*, was extended to such a point that the surface of some impressionist painting became a rough texture of dots and dabs of paint. Delacroix had found greens within reds, blues and purples in the shadows of yellow. He abandoned the idea that a red object, for instance, was red all over. Any other color might exist within the red area, either because the laws of physics produced it by reflection ("Color is a merging of reflections," he said) or simply because the painter wanted it there in order to enhance or reduce the intensity of the colors stroked on near by. From this starting point, the impressionists began to use their eyes like prisms, turning white light into all its components of the spectrum, red,

orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet.

From Courbet the impressionists inherited the inexhaustible mine of the everyday world. Some of them in their first days knew him in his last ones at the *Brasserie des Martyrs*. The Barbizon painters amplified Courbet's legacy, revealing landscape as a subject independent of romantic fervor or classical formality. They opened a door through which the impressionists rushed pell-mell into the open air, where they discovered their studios in fields, along river banks, and, for that matter, in the city streets.

These legacies seemed to contradict one another and all of them contradicted the art of Ingres. But the impressionists found compatibilities beneath what appeared to be antitheses. Technically the impressionists learned from all these sources and dozens of others—the English landscapists, the Japanese print, the art of Venice and of the French court, the new process of photography, perhaps too the scientific researches into the nature of light and color by such men as Chevreul, Helmholtz, Maxwell, and Rood.

Monet

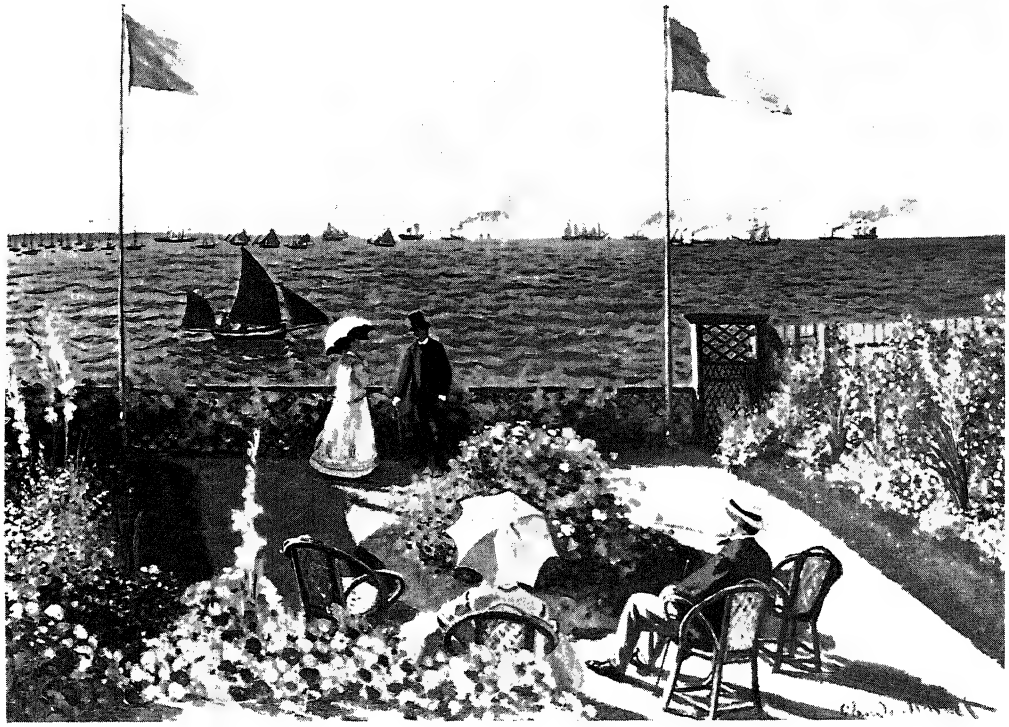
Impressionism as a technique devoted to capturing effects of light out of doors is exemplified most purely in the painting of Claude Monet (1840–1926), who forced it to its limits, and then beyond.

Monet was the son of a grocer; his parents refused to support him in a career as an artist, offering to buy him out of his military service if he would abandon the idea. This he refused to do, and by the time he was sixteen he had a local reputation as a caricaturist in his home city of Le Havre. His interest in landscape was stimulated by painters who came to Le Havre to paint the port or the beaches, particularly by Eugène Boudin (who will be seen later). In Paris Monet identified himself with the impressionists although he had had an occasional Salon acceptance with a mild success in 1866. His poverty was desperate; malnutrition contributed to the death of his wife; he had to write begging letters to friends and was sometimes without money to buy paints. As late as 1888 Manet was helping him financially. (The similarity of their names sometimes caused confusion in exhibitions—to Manet's indignation.) But after 1890, when he was fifty years old, Monet was a prosperous artist.

Monet's development can be summarized in a handful of pictures that must stand for many hundreds. He was an insatiable worker. *Red Boats at Argenteuil* [207], painted in 1875, is a fully developed impressionist landscape of the period of the first group exhibition. The stretch of water is shot through with strokes of blue in many different shades. The reflections of boats and shore are struck into it freely, in bright tints of greens and pinks. On its sunny side, the largest of the boats is yellow in the highest lights, shot with lavender near the water, yet a bright rosy color overall; on its shadow side the hull is a strong violet-blue, made up of dark blues, grape colors, violet-reds, and a touch or two of vermilion. No colors are pulled together; each stroke (at close range, that is) tells individually. The boat is decorated with a stripe running around it near the gunwale. On the shadow side this stripe cuts through the purple-blue as a brilliant emerald green; on the sunny side it is bright yellow. The small clouds are flicks and dabs of pure white. On the grassy bank half a dozen greens are freely juxtaposed and intermingled, some yellowish, some bluish; the houses are pinkish with similar variations.

From a little distance these different tints and colors within single areas tend to disappear as individual strokes. The eye "mixes" them and in doing so creates colors with more vibration, more sparkle, than would have been possible if the various reds or greens or blues or pinks had been mixed on the palette and applied in large areas in the conventional way or pulled together by "blending" on the canvas. In this stage of impressionism form has not disappeared, although light, shattering against it, is already permeating and softening its surface, obscuring its details.

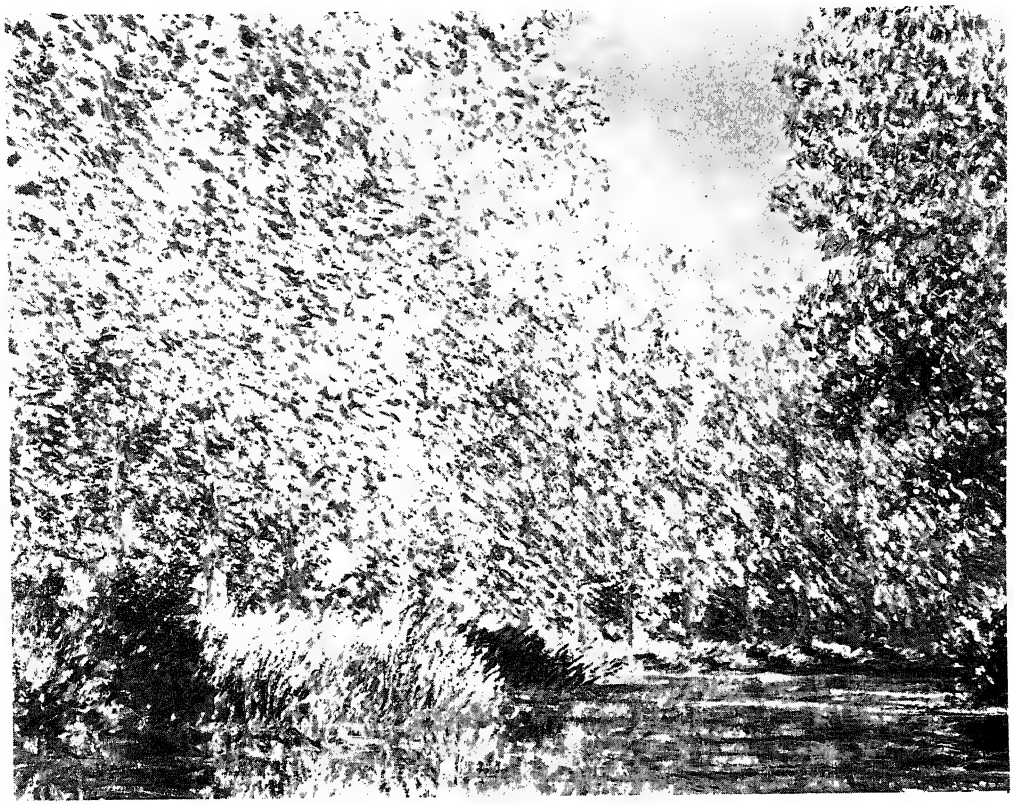
In black and white, the sunlit side of the red boat is all but indistinguishable from the water around it. In color, however, the



208. MONET: *Terrace at Le Havre,* 1866. 23½ x 31½". Collection the Rev. T. Pitcairn, Bryn Athyn, Pa.

contrast is quite strong. The values—that is, the lightness or darkness of the colors—are so nearly identical that in black and white the contrast disappears. This is not merely an accident of photographic translation; it is a result of the fact that Monet is painting in terms of color as light, rather than in terms of form as revealed by light and shade. As a contrast to make this point, *Red Boats at Argenteuil* can be compared with the *Terrace at Le Havre* [208] painted nine years earlier, which is still conceived in light and shadow. The forms are decisive, everywhere defined, although in color this picture is equally bright, equally sunny. The only areas where form tends to disappear are those of the clumps and sprays of flowers, painted in spots of red, green, and yellow with almost no shadow. Elsewhere the forms exist solidly in the light that strikes across their surfaces to reveal them. In *Red Boats at Argenteuil,* light is already beginning not so much to reveal the objects as to be revealed by them. Light permeates them, they fuse with it; forms do not interrupt light, as they do in the *Terrace at Le Havre,* but are caught up in it.

Monet's preoccupation with reducing all visual experience to terms of pure light became an obsession. When his young wife died he was horrified to find himself analyzing the nacreous tints of her skin in the early morning light. As he continued to paint, wishing he could have been "born blind in order to gain his sight and be able to paint objects without knowing what they were," as he began more and more to develop the ability to see light and nothing but light, light became like a corrosive substance eating away the objects bathed in it. *Spring Trees by a Lake* [209] is all but formless. Within the twinkling strokes of blue, blue-green, pure green, yellow-green, and yellow covering most of the canvas, we barely recognize, by occasional vertical strokes of purplish and reddish tints, the



209. MONET: *Spring Trees by a Lake,* 1888. 29 x 36". Philadelphia Museum of Art, William L. Elkins Collection.

trunks of a few trees. The extreme of this progressive dematerialization of matter is reached in "effects" of certain hazy and foggy atmospheres where the canvas dissolves into mist and material forms become mists within mists.

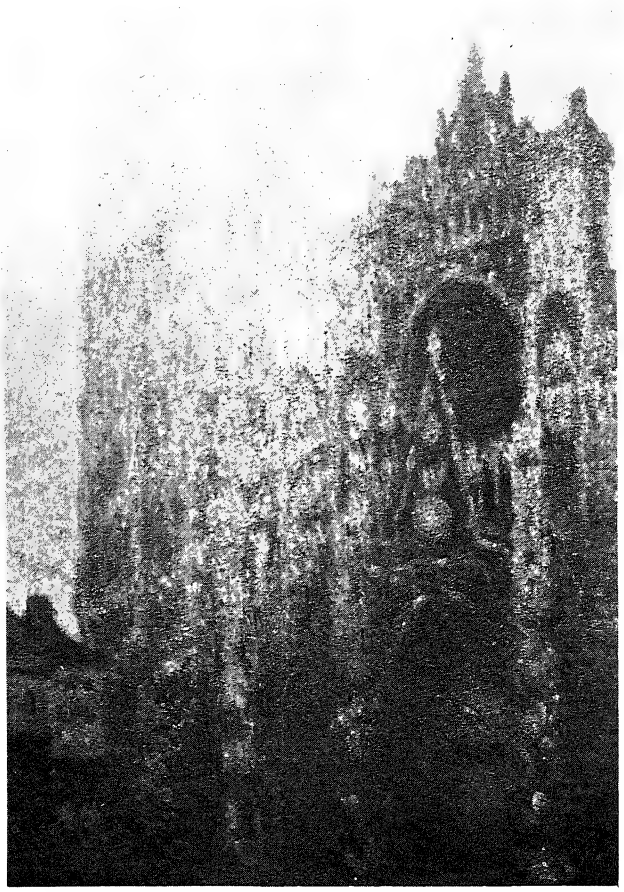
Between the *Terrace at Le Havre* and his late pictures Monet changed from a painter responding to nature into one fascinated by an abstract problem. In the early pictures the attraction of subject is great; in the *Terrace at Le Havre,* half the observer's pleasure is his feeling of participation in a world of sun, air, flowers, and water. There is a keen and delightful sense of the fresh spanking breeze, the presence of the sparkling sea. There is also the more abstract pleasure offered by the certainty, the vigor, and the invention of the painting just as painting. In the later pictures this is the whole pleasure. It must be, for the objects from which we might have gained the sense of participation in the scene have become devoured by a technical process.

Monet invented a name for what he was trying to achieve: *instantaneity.* In 1891 he exhibited, at Durand-Ruel's, a series of fifteen paintings of haystacks in the different lights of different times of day, analyzing the color-light relationships in various stages between half-lights of early morning and evening and the full blaze of midday. This faintly pedantic exhibition was a great success. Monet then set out on an even more elaborate analysis and painted some forty pictures of Rouen Cathedral [210] on gray days, bright days, in early light, late light, full light, light at different seasons of the year. These exercises are interesting, but they emphatically isolate the limitation of Monet's method. The monumental gray form of the cathedral is ground into a pulp of blues, oranges, pinks, and lavenders. The geometrical complications of its buttresses,

windows, spires, and tracery become tottering masses of tinted fluff; they lean and waver in random placements on the canvas. A cathedral, with its mass, its organization, its logical formality, is a poor choice for dematerialization in close-range painting when it is supposed to be existing within full light. Theoretically we should be able to forget that this is a cathedral which appears to be going to pieces; practically it is difficult to do so.

But the Rouen pictures were followed by another series, this time of a perfect subject. In the garden of his house at Giverny, which Monet had bought with the proceeds from his first successful sale, there was a pool with water lilies which he had painted from time to time. Now in the 1890's he discovered in the surface of the pool, and the leaves and blossoms floating upon it, a subject with enough material to last him for the rest of his life. The shimmering, shifting translucence of the water, the delicate and even translucent petals of the blossoms, the flat shiny pads of leaves floating or half submerged in water close to the same color, with the light glancing off surfaces or striking through them onto surfaces below, repeating and reflecting on every hand, the whites and the rainbow tints—these were inexhaustible in their combinations and recombinations. Now Monet's canvases became the surfaces of pools, fragmented areas where water, light, air, and the delicate substance of blossoms all partook of one another, echoed one another, and crossed one another's boundaries until there was no differentiation between them.

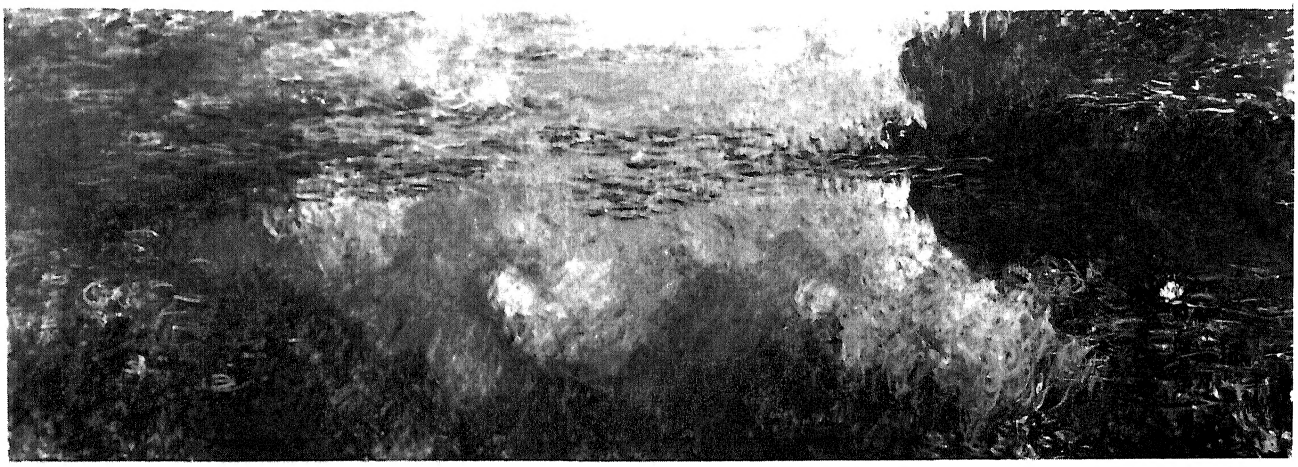
The water-lily paintings supplied the motif for Monet's last work, a series of large decorative panels [211, 212]. But in these hugely expanded canvases, with large brush strokes, the forms of nature are difficult to distinguish. If the paintings are regarded as representations of lilies and water with ripples and glancing reflections of light, they never become more than great inchoate masses of opalescent color arbitrarily cut off on four sides by a frame. But if they are regarded as abstract arrangements of color applied in directed strokes, they gradually coalesce. One movement of strokes across the canvas is revealed as a



210. MONET: *Rouen Cathedral: Tour d'Albane, Early Morning*, 1894. 41¾ x 29". Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

check or a buttress to another; a system beginning in one section and seeming to vanish will reappear elsewhere. The colors are woven and built into a structure that is its own reason for being. The "systems" in these paintings are free inventions, felt rather than calculated, and the danger is to exaggerate their precision or to find within them a logic that does not exist. But it is safe to say that Monet, from his impressionist beginning when he painted spontaneous approximations of visual effects of light and atmosphere, gradually transformed his art into one of abstract surfaces where relationships of form and color exist for themselves in spite of the vestigial remains of a subject.

It is on this basis that Monet now seems to have anticipated a school of contemporary extremists. Jackson Pollock (1912–

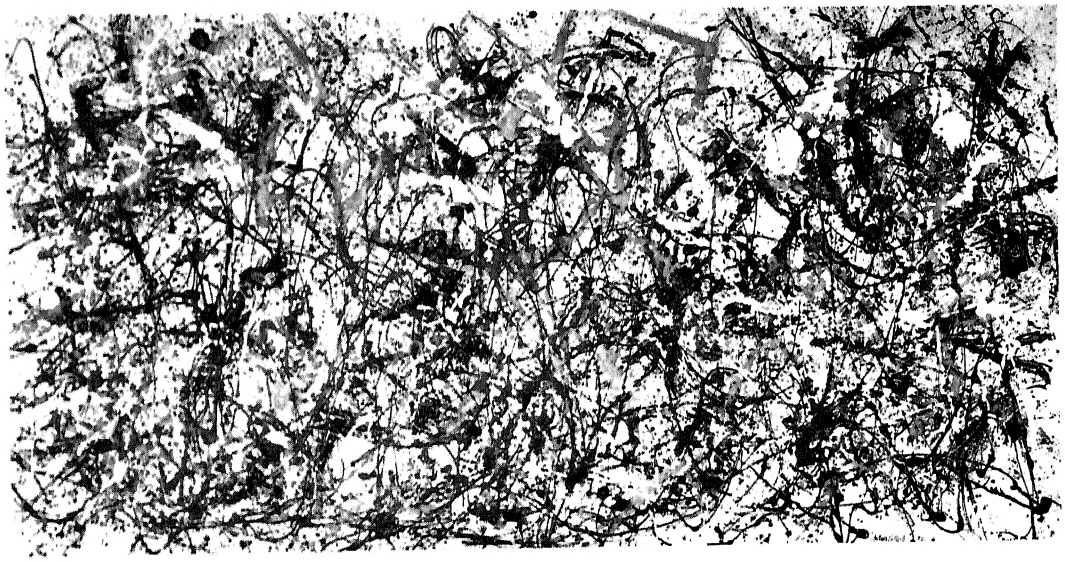


211. MONET: *Water Lilies, c.* 1925. 79¾ x 221½". Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. (Destroyed by fire, 1958.)

212. MONET: Detail from Figure 211.

1956) painted by dripping, flicking, dribbling, or pouring semiliquid colors onto a canvas (or panel) laid an the floor [213]. The pattern of different colors, densely intermingled or freely splattered, exists without even secondary reference to nature. It exists for itself as color, as line, as a complex within which movements, systems, rhythms are overlaid and intertwined. The same thing can be said about Monet's late water-lily pictures, if their starting point of light playing over the forms of nature is ignored.

213. POLLOCK: *Autumn Rhythm,* 1950. 105 x 207". Metropolitan Museum of Art, Hearn Fund.



214. MONET: *Woman in a Garden, Springtime, c.* 1875. 19⅝ x 25¾". Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

Thus Monet becomes a bridge between the naturalism of early impressionist painting and a contemporary school of extreme abstraction. "Abstract impressionism" would be an appropriate term to describe Pollock's sparkling interweaving of dots, splashes, and ropelike lines of color, and the term is sometimes used as a subtle distinction within the wider "abstract expressionist" school of contemporary painting, which will be seen in a later chapter [548, 549].

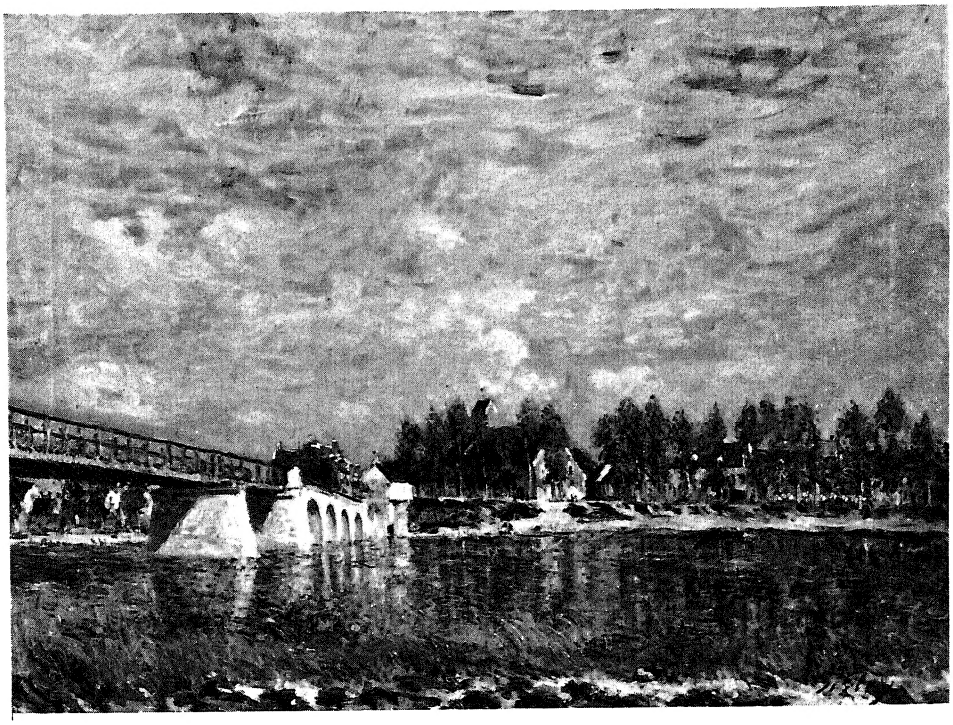
Monet's landscapes and the late semi-abstract paintings into which they merged are his historically important work. They obscure his portraits and figure studies, most of which were done between 1860 and the early 1870's. (He did many of his wife.) In any case, he had no great interest in human beings as personalities to be interpreted; he painted them from much the same point of view as he painted landscape —that is, as elements of nature in light. In the gentle *Woman in a Garden, Springtime* [214] the woman is more like a blossoming shrub than a person.

Sisley and Pissarro

The two other "pure" impressionists in the group were Alfred Sisley (1839–1899) and Camille Pissarro (1830–1903). Their experiments were less venturesome, within narrower boundaries, than Monet's. Hence they always fall into second place with brief consideration in books of this kind, which is too bad but inevitable.

A painter's merit cannot be gauged by the number of lines of type required to comment on it, and to comment at any length on Sisley would involve repetition of much that already has been said about Corot and Monet. His fresh and quiet art [215] has affinities with that of both these men.

Sisley resigned himself early to poverty, obscurity, and official rejections, and although he exhibited in the first impressionist show and three others, he spent very little time in Paris and finally retired to the village of Moret, where he could exist at minimum expense surrounded by subject



215. SISLEY: *Bridge at Villeneuve,* date unknown. 21½ x 29". Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.

matter that appealed to him—a quiet countryside and a village with old buildings, bridges, and river banks. Sisley's parents were English and he spent some time in that country. Of all French painters he comes closest to the special lyrical response to nature found in English painters and even more in English poets. Corot was his idol, and his painting has Corot's serenity beneath the more vibrant impressionist surface. Once he had discovered the impressionist palette and technique—which he never forced—his manner changed very little over the years, yet his work is not repetitious. Each picture is remarkably complete in its effect, where much impressionism seems fragmentary. Without Monet's passion for experiment, which kept the pictures pouring forth, and without a market to set a demand, which he would have worked to supply, Sisley painted with great deliberation, allowing the fullest expression of his sensibilities. He did not live to see the triumph of impressionism extend as far as his own work, but immediately upon his death his paintings began to fetch high prices. During his lifetime he sold them for twenty-five or thirty francs.

Pissarro's impressionism has much of the sobriety of Sisley's but is less reflective. He was the oldest member of the group, being two years older even than Manet. Born in the Virgin Islands, he came to Paris the year of the great exposition of 1855. Everyone who knew Pissarro seems to have left some account of him, and by all these accounts his life and his character were a catalogue of virtues—loyalty to his friends, wisdom as the father of a large family, courage in adversity, and patience, tolerance, honesty, and industry in all circumstances.

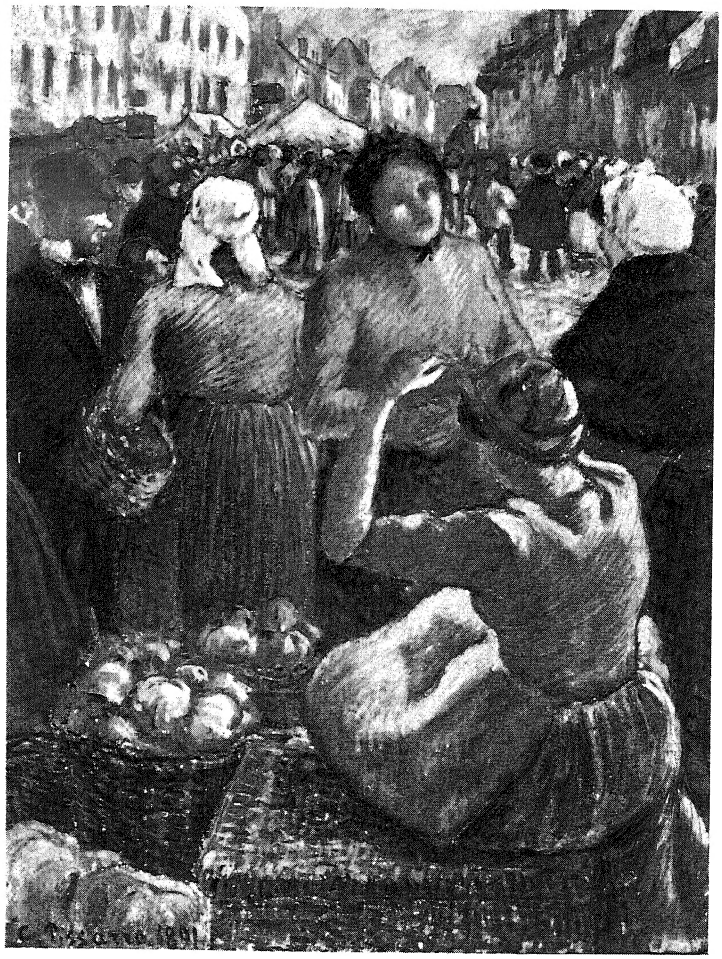
Although Pissarro was intent upon capturing transient effects just as Monet was, he never abandoned the relative discipline of early impressionism, and for a while late in his career he joined the "neo-impressionists," who tried to solidify impressionism by systematizing its free prismatic shattering of light into a scientific application of color into minutely calculated dots [405].

Pissarro soon abandoned this extreme, but that he was attracted to it at all shows his cautiousness in the use of impressionist effects. While Monet was pushing further into exploration of effects of light in air at the expense of form, Pissarro was retreating. *The Market at Gisors* [216] is an effort to retain the atmospheric vibration of impressionism while at the same time imposing the discipline of well-defined contours on forms monumentally arranged in space.

The Market at Gisors is a late picture, but even in his early ones when he was sharing with Monet the excitement of the impressionist discoveries, Pissarro retained his respect for the material fact of the subjects he was painting. When he painted trees and fields [218], they remain trees and fields rather than becoming a multitude of small elements reflecting a characteristic spring light. In no circumstances could he have shared Monet's wish to be ignorant of the objects he saw. Of all the impressionists he is the one most closely allied to the Barbizon spirit with its love of fields, copses, and peasant huts as part of a simple life with a nobility of its own.

But his cityscapes, too, are of a great vivacity [217]. He reduces crowds, carriages, and individual figures to the merest suggestion, in scattered dots and his typical "commas" of paint, but he never allows his city buildings to decompose as Monet's cathedrals did. Pissarro is a careful painter —Monet seems careless at times. He was the only one of the impressionists to exhibit in all eight of the group shows, and during the constant squabbles he was the unofficial moderator.

More than any other member of the group, Pissarro encouraged younger men. At least three painters who were notoriously suspicious and thorny to deal with—Degas, Cézanne, and Gauguin—always retained a deep affection for him. Like Monet's and Sisley's, his financial situation was often desperate and at best difficult, but finally, at the age of sixty-two, he had the satisfaction of seeing his reputation established, not spectacularly but soundly enough, in a large retrospective exhibition organized by Durand-Ruel. It was a gratifyingly happy ending to an admirable career.



216. PISSARRO: *The Market at Gisors*, 1891. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Louis E. Stern Collection. 13½ x 10¼". Gouache.

Degas: "The Bellelli Family"

Midway during the careers of Monet, Sisley, and Pissarro, pure impressionism was abandoned by two painters who felt limited by the transient effects it imposed. One of these men, Renoir, brought impressionism directly into the tradition of the old masters by subjecting it to their disciplines. The other, Cézanne, subjected it to new disciplines, making it the point of departure for the most radical redirection of the art of painting in some six centuries.

A third, Degas, had never accepted impressionism on Monet's terms in the first place, and was its great traditionalist even while he was one of its most startling inno-